

## Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 20, 2009 – Good Shepherd Parish

### Scripture Reading: Micah 5:1-4a

Thus says the LORD:

You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah

too small to be among the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel;  
whose origin is from of old,  
from ancient times.

Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the  
time

when she who is to give birth has borne,  
and the rest of his kindred shall return  
to the children of Israel.

He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock  
by the strength of the LORD,  
in the majestic name of the LORD, his God;  
and they shall remain, for now his greatness  
shall reach to the ends of the earth;  
he shall be peace.

### Psalm: Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

R. (4) Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your  
face and we shall be saved.

O shepherd of Israel, hearken,  
from your throne upon the cherubim, shine  
forth.  
Rouse your power,  
and come to save us.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face  
and we shall be saved.

Once again, O LORD of hosts,  
look down from heaven, and see;  
take care of this vine,  
and protect what your right hand has planted,  
the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face  
and we shall be saved.

May your help be with the man of your right hand,  
with the son of man whom you yourself made  
strong.  
Then we will no more withdraw from you;  
give us new life, and we will call upon your  
name.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face  
and we shall be saved.

### Scripture Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10

Brothers and sisters: When Christ came into the  
world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,  
but a body you prepared for me;  
in holocausts and sin offerings you took no  
delight.

Then I said, 'As is written of me in the scroll,  
behold, I come to do your will, O God.'"

First he says, "Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts  
and sin offerings, you neither desired nor delighted  
in." These are offered according to the law. Then  
he says, "Behold, I come to do your will." He  
takes away the first to establish the second. By this  
"will," we have been consecrated through the  
offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

### Gospel: Luke 1:39-45

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in  
haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the  
house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When  
Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped  
in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy  
Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said,

Blessed are you among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

And how does this happen to me, that the mother  
of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment  
the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the  
infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you  
who believed that what was spoken to you by the  
Lord would be fulfilled."



Readings and excerpts from the *Lectionary for Mass* ©1970, 1997,  
1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., ©1997, 1981, 1968  
International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., and ©1964  
National Catholic Welfare Conference, Inc. Excerpts from the  
*Sacramentary* ©1969–1985 ICEL. Excerpts from *Living Liturgy*  
©2001 The Order of St. Benedict, Inc. Clip art ©1994, 1996 The  
Order of St. Benedict, Inc. All rights reserved.

## **Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 20, 2009 – Good Shepherd Parish**

### **INVITATION TO PRAY**

*Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.*

### **Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.**

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

### **INVITATION TO REFLECT**

During Advent we have been celebrating our emptiness. I suppose this sounds odd, and yet give it a thought. If we were completely filled up we would have no room to let anyone or anything in. We would be like a clump of mud or a great thick mountain. Nice to look at, maybe, but not so good at conversation. Somewhere in scripture the people ask God to take their hearts of stone and make them into hearts of flesh. Throughout Advent we have been asking especially for that. A time to become aware of and then thank God for the spacious emptiness that a human heart has within it. Living hearts, not stone ones. But increasing emptiness and increasing darkness can be frightening. Here in the Northern hemisphere the dark spreads out its kingdom every day as Christmas comes nearer. We see less by natural light, and our body systems squirm to readjust. True confession time: I used to be resentful as the daylight hours became shorter and shorter—and especially when “daylight savings time” was through and the dark settled in an hour sooner in the afternoon. It was dark well before I left the office. How depressing. But finally, a few years ago, I saw some wisdom in deprivation and darkness. Increased dark allows human beings to hunker down inside their shelter, cozy and patient, waiting for the light to come back. It helps them reflect upon themselves. Such small creatures within so vast a night.

God says as much to Bethlehem in the [First Reading](#), “You are so tiny! You are not even counted among the clans of Judah. You are empty of big ideas, power, royalty and influence. How can you be sufficient to bring forth a ruler of Jerusalem?” But light had already come from that darkness, the large from the small. King David had been born in Bethlehem, centuries before (see [1 Samuel: 17:12](#)). And of course, Jesus was to be born in the same town. A dark, strange wide place in the road producing kings? Yes. And in the same way, our darkness and our emptiness are where Jesus is to be born on Christmas. The places in you that are gloomy, angry, or jealous, these are your darkness. The friends who leave you behind, who have a high, family time while you are so alone, this murk is where the child will be born.

Watch Mary hasten to her cousin’s house, a long trip, on foot, over dirt and sand and rocks, under the hot, hot sun ([Gospel](#)). She does not have to be queenly and coddled in order to mother of The One. She does not spend even a second worrying whether the way is too hard. Her mind sees the light that will shine from within her. Everything else is in second place. Let your emptiness speak humbly within you. For a minute or two quit trying so hard to make everything alright. Let go and let God. That way you will get to know the one whose “origins are old” ([First Reading](#)). You might even, with loving respect, let him take up his home in you. He can make himself whatever size is needed. Try it for Christmas. And for heaven’s sake, stop worrying.

### **INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING**

1. If you were expecting a majestic ruler how would you have felt about the stable and manger? When you experience poverty in your life, do you accept it as a meeting place with God or do you run from it?
2. The infant “leaped for joy” in his mother’s womb at the recognition of the savior. Discuss this moment as mankind’s welcome to the savior. How close do you come to “leaping for joy” when you recognize God’s presence in your life?
3. Where does Mary’s greatness lie in salvation history? How about you? When the Holy Spirit gives you insights, do you always believe them or act on them?

### **INVITATION TO ACT**

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

### **CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY**

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Lord, fill our hearts with your love, and as you revealed to us by an angel the coming of your Son as man, so lead us through his suffering and death to the glory of his resurrection, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen