

## 4th Sunday of Advent A/2010

We come close to the feast of Christmas where we will be celebrating the anniversary of the birth of the Lord. A question we cannot help asking ourselves is about the identity of Jesus: Who is this person? What is his background? How is his personal story related to the history of the people who gave him birth?

The readings of this Sunday try to answer these questions by showing us the origin of Jesus in its relation to the History of Israel and to the salvation of the world.

In the first reading, Isaiah describes a strange incident that happens under the reign of King Ahaz. In fact, as Israel was under threat from a neighboring enemy, God offers the king to ask him a sign that will seal the divine intervention in the land. Pushed by a false piety, Ahaz refused to do so, but instead he concluded a treaty with the Assyrians in order to protect the country.

Against the behavior of Ahaz, God intervened through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah to promise a sign more brilliant than what the king himself would have asked, namely to let a virgin conceive and bear a son to whom they will give the name of Immanuel and who will become the savior of his people.

What is behind this text is the idea that when we are overwhelmed with problems and conflicts, without sometimes knowing what to do in order to resolve them, God is able to step in and help us. However, God cannot do it without our cooperation.

The challenge we have here is that most of the time we act like Ahaz. We might know that we are in deep trouble, but in spite of all that, we want to resolve our problems alone, without God. The truth, however, is that for some problems we can depend on our own, but for others we need God's help. To count on God's help does not diminish at all our responsibility, instead, it gives us strength to know that our heavenly Father is with us and cares.

Another idea in this text refers to the historical perspective of the prophecy of Isaiah. In fact, any prophecy always has two sides, namely a short term and a long term. The short term of this prophecy refers to the immediate history of Israel. Its long term goes beyond Israel and points to the salvation of the world as whole.

This vision allows us to understand why Matthew presents the birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. As foretold by Isaiah, Mary was a virgin betrothed to Joseph and, before they lived together, she was found with a child through the Holy Spirit. As Joseph planned to repudiate her, he was summoned by the angel of the Lord to keep her and to give the child the name of Jesus, signifying thereby that he was born to be the savior who would save God's people from their sins.

The fact that Jesus was born through the action of the Holy Spirit teaches us something about his nature and the role of the Holy Spirit. In fact, in the Jewish tradition, it was the Holy Spirit who brought to the world the truth about God, as well as he inspired the prophets about what they had to say from God and how they had to say it. It was through the action of the

Holy Spirit that the world was created and re-created from the flood that destroyed life under Noah.

If Jesus is born through the power of the Holy Spirit, it means that he is the one who brings God's truth to the world. He is the one who tells us who God is for us and what he wants us to be as his children; he is the one who gives life and recreates us.

We are very often blinded by our ignorance, led astray by our prejudices and the eyes of our minds are darkened by our sins. Jesus comes to set us free so that we look at things differently and have the life of the Father in us. In that sense, we are not really alive until Jesus enters into our lives.

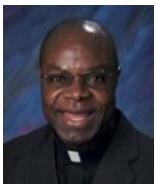
If Mary has conceived through the action of the Holy Spirit, that is, without human intervention, it means that for God nothing is impossible. As he did in the past in the incarnation of Jesus, by making the impossible possible, God can do it again today for those who trust him.

It is that mystery of the incarnation of Jesus that Mary and Joseph have accepted in faith. That mystery was announced long time ago by the prophets and today has become manifest in the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus is a descendant of David according to the flesh, but the Son of God by the power of Holy Spirit. It is for the proclamation of that mystery that Saint Paul has become the apostle of the nations and a slave of Christ Jesus.

At the eve of the Christmas feast, we are told this story so that we recognize in Jesus our savior and come to the obedience of faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now let me finish by referring to St Joseph. The Gospel says that Joseph had a plan of marriage with Mary. But suddenly that plan was disturbed as he found her pregnant with a child through the action of the Holy Spirit. As a just man, Joseph accepted in faith what God asked him to do. The question I ask is this: as Christmas comes close, many people, some of them you really dislike, will want to come to your home for the festivity. Will you accept to be disturbed in your plan by these people, like St Joseph? Will you accept to quiet your animosity and aggressiveness and allow the family to meet in peace for this year? May the example of Mary and Joseph help you welcome God's grace by welcoming each other at Christmas! God bless you all!

**Isaiah 7, 10-14; Romans 1, 1-7; Matthew 1, 18-24**



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