

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, December 20, 2009

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

Fourth Sunday of Advent 2009

Celebrate Jesus

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Micah 5:2-5a

Canticle 3 or 15

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

Yes, Bill, ANOTHER Canticle. Some have, mistakenly, called me “a Bible scholar”. Please stop applying such a moniker to my humble efforts to clarify and expand MY personal journey through scripture. I AM NOT A BIBLE SCHOLAR. I, like most of you, am a SEEKER of a personal relationship with the Creator and nothing more or less than that. As Paul advised Timothy: “STUDY to show YOURSELF approved unto God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Part of my vision for these pages is to expand the “horizons” of possibilities for those who were not “raised” in a tradition that included “other scriptures” and sources for enlightenment. Please remember that I, too, was not “raised” in a tradition that utilized the Book of Common Prayer so, this is really self-instructional. I must admit that I “cheated” somewhat by including the same Canticle as the New Testament gospel citation for this week, ***“The Magnificat”***. I did so in order to show the “source material” for the Canticle from the Book of Common Prayer. God’s revelation is magnanimous and a veritable garden of blooming inspiration for those who can see the beauty and His presence in many varied sources. It is very “Christian” to see God in the entire world including its literature. It all depends on our attitudes toward various “inputs” that surround us. Always, when reading or listening, we should apply the DISCERNMENT that we have received to “test” the source for truth. I can hear God’s voice in the various “inspirational” writers’ works. I see a profound “sermon” in the misty autumn morning. I witness God’s presence every time a babe is born. I find God in almost everything I see, hear, read or taste. Hopefully, the reader will find “God’s presence” in these pages as I expose my “secret”, inner self for MY examination as part of MY discipline. Christmas is upon us. Have we done the work of Advent? Are we prepared to receive the grace, mercy and love exemplified by ***“God so loved the world that he GAVE his ONLY BEGOTTEN SON...”*** the baby, Jesus, His most precious creation, the most perfect gift that God could give. Thank you, God. He’s just what we NEEDED. Merry Christmas! Now, go and remember and CELEBRATE JESUS.

Micah 5:2-5a

***But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth;
and he shall be the one of peace.***

Little is known of the prophet, Micah, other than what is contained in his book. He was a contemporary of Isaiah and prophesied during the reigns of kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. His was a time of social and political upheaval. (Can anyone identify with this state of affairs?) The theme of his book is "judgment and redemption". He looked forward to a time of deliverance for the penitent people of Israel. Micah prophesied that a "deliverer" would come to give "peace" to the entire world. What does it mean to call Jesus "The Prince of Peace"? Is this "peace" solely the absence of "war"? Did Jesus bring "peace" to the entire world? Does history recount that, after the birth of Jesus, there has been continual "peace"? The "peace" that Jesus came to deliver was "peace between God and mankind" in that "salvation" would be given to the penitent who embraced the "gift" of the Messiah. God "delivered" his "gift" of "peace" by sending his only Son to live among us, show us how to live and to teach us about the Father. He taught us that a PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP with the Creator IS POSSIBLE. IF we reject the "gift of God", we have not respected either God or the Son. IF we reject the love, grace and mercy that Jesus represents, we "neglect so great a salvation" and remain at "war" with God. God did not send Jesus to "directly" promulgate an end to "physical war". God sent Jesus to change individuals and give them "peace" and redemption from being "separated from God". Jesus is a "bridge" to God provided as "salvation". We know this if we believe: ***"For God so loved the world that he GAVE his only begotten Son that, whosoever believes in him should not perish but inherit eternal life."*** IF individuals accept the gift of Jesus and live in peace with the Father, it will allow us to live in "peace" with each other. An understanding of the purpose of Jesus and the cause and effect that his "coming into the world" would allow is central to our understanding the "gift of Jesus". IF mankind is not at "peace" with God AFTER the "gift of Jesus", it means that we have discounted the "gift" and not fully understood or accepted the "gift of love, mercy, peace and

salvation” that God intended. Are we truly ready to receive the “gift of Jesus”? IF we do accept the “peace with God” that is offered, what will it “change” in our daily lives, our marriages, our work places, our homes, our churches, our states, our nation? Each is responsible to God for their acceptance or rejection of the “gift of Jesus”. What is my choice? Will I receive or reject Jesus? IF we reject, we have not done the work of Advent. Christmas is upon us. My God is the God of the second chance and it is never too late to accept “the gift of Jesus”.

“Come, thou long-expected Jesus. Come to set thy people FREE.”

Hopefully, even if nothing else has been learned, our discussions during the Season of Advent have added understanding of the words and emotions exemplified by many of our “Christmas Carols”. ***“JOY to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare Him room and Heaven and Nature sing.”*** Let us ***“sing with the Spirit and the UNDERSTANDING, also.”***

Canticle 15 Page 91, BCP (Book of Common Prayer)

The Song of Mary Magnificat

Luke 1:46-55

***My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; ****

for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed: *

the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him *

in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm, *

he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, *

and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, *

and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel, *

for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

The promise he made to our fathers, *

to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *

as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

I purposely left in the page citation from the Book of Common Prayer. This “Song of Mary” is called the “Magnificat” because, in the Latin Vulgate translation, the opening word is “Magnificat” which means “glorify”. This is common practice as the books “named” Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy are “named” by the first word in their opening lines in Latin. There is debate about the last two lines having been added at some later date by scribes who “copied” the manuscripts. You will notice that the “modern editors” even set it apart as though separated by time and content from the original.

Read with the “Spirit and the understanding also.” In this “Magnificat”, Mary “glorifies” God for his selection of her as the “Mother of God”, the one selected to give birth to Jesus. These are beautiful words of love, respect and humility that GLORIFY God for his “gift”. Are WE ready to receive Jesus with this same love, respect and humility? This is the basis of “Hail Mary, full of grace. Blessed art thou among women....” and the anthem, “Ave, Maria”. Read the words of Elizabeth in the Luke citation and you will know that you have heard them before, somewhere? Now you know the rest of the story.

Hebrews 10:5-10

***Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.***

***Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God'
(in the scroll of the book it is written of me)."***

When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

This opening “quotation” is a conversation between Jesus and God in which He explains the purpose for his coming into “human form”: To do the will of God. It was “proof” that “keeping” the Torah Law was NOT sufficient for the payment (re-payment=redemption) for MY SINS. Jesus came to earth in human form to “become the sacrifice” of blood. Think about it. Jesus came to do the will of our Father...to die as the sacrificial lamb as a “substitution” payment for “the sins of the world”. The “old Law” was abolished and replaced by a “permanent” cleansing with the Blood of the Lamb. Any “cleansing” under the “old Law” was temporary but, the “new covenant” tolled from the death of the “sacrifice” until eternity ends. Sanctify means “to set apart” in the sense of “cleansing for a purpose”. Those who have been “sanctified” are called SAINTS. Once we are “sanctified” by the Blood of the Lamb, it is “once and for all time”. I know, it is almost “too good to be true”. My mind can scarcely take it in. I recall a song which says ***“When on the cross, His only Son not sparing, sent him to DIE, I scarce can take it in.”*** This scripture is reflexive of ***“For God so loved the world that he GAVE His only begotten Son that, whoever believes in Him shall not perish but, have everlasting life.”*** I’ll let the reader pick his own “version” of John 3:16 that gets across the POINT. **GOD LOVES US AS MUCH AS HIS ONLY SON!** Can you get your mind around this? The “Christmas Story” is the opening overture of the opera that ends with the crucifixion and resurrection into eternity. IF God truly loves us as much as his only Son, then, God will also not let our SPIRIT die. We, too, will be resurrected into His

presence for eternity. This scenario begins with the birth of a helpless child born into poverty to a teen-age mother in a stable in a backwater village. Christmas is the beginning...Easter is the finale before the encore of His "second coming". God has a plan for each of us. Are we ready to receive God's plan for our lives? Are we ready to receive the "gift of Jesus"? Advent is the "beginning" and "eternity" is the "end" of our journey. JOY, JOY, JOY, Christ has come. Christ WILL come again. Praise be to God.

Luke 1:39-45(46-55)

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

[And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

**for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.**

**His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.**

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

**He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;**

**he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.**

**He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,**

**according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."]**

This exchange between Elizabeth and Mary is well-known to most of us whether Catholic or not. It is the basis of a lot of "opinions" about theology. Most "opinions" are just that... GUESSES based on study and experiences. The reader should "remember" that Luke was writing from the remembrances of those who were a party to the events or were told about the events. The important point is this...Elizabeth recognized the importance that the "special blessing", the child who Mary was carrying, would be to the entire world. To

Mary, it was a confirmation of the “speech” by the angel who told Mary of the conception of Jesus. It was a “planned pregnancy” from the beginning of time. Note that the first “prophecy” of the coming Messiah is found in the third chapter of GENESIS. When God created the world, he KNEW that Man would separate himself from God’s presence through sin and a “redeemer” would be necessary? God did not separate himself from mankind. Mankind separated mankind from God. Jesus came to “restore PEACE” between God and Mankind. I know that, if I had been “Adam” or “Eve”, I, too, would have done no better than they. Being human means that “I am NOT God”. God does not need redemption...I need redemption. God’s plan took our sinful tendencies into account and gave us an “escape plan”, an “exit strategy” in the “form” of a savior which would be Jesus, His Son. Mary understood this “function” that she was playing in the drama of the ages. The **Magnificat**. She glorified God for the opportunity to carry out God’s promise to mankind. An angel told her, Elizabeth confirmed it and the birth of a Son was the completion of a “planned pregnancy”, a promise made long ago and fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Are God’s plans still in action? Did the “Christmas Story” end some two thousand years ago? What are we “celebrating” at Christmas? Jesus confirms to us that God KEEPS HIS PROMISES to us just as he kept His promise to Jesus. God made a promise, God kept the promise and the rest is up to each of us. Are we “ready” to receive this “gift of promise”? I’m so GLAD and JOYFUL that, at least once a year, the secular world has to at least THINK about the “Christmas Story’s events”. It is most important that I DON’T FORGET the true meaning of Christmas. Christmas is HERE. Are we ready to receive? If we truly receive the “gift” of redemption that Christ represents, the OPPORTUNITY for Salvation, then we ARE prepared and we have done the “work” of Advent. ***“Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her KING. Let EVERY heart PREPARE Him room and Heaven and nature sing, and Heaven, and Heaven and nature sing.”*** NOW you know the rest of the story. Christmas (Christ Mass is CELEBRATED) is our opportunity to CELEBRATE JESUS and to receive Jesus into our PREPARED HEARTS. ***“Weeping lasts through the night but, JOY COMES IN THE MORNING.”*** JOY is a choice and, so is sadness. I pray that you choose JOY.

Merry Christmas to YOU and YOURS.