



ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

THIS SUNDAY December 23 & BEYOND”

“More to the Story than perhaps you knew”



You know the plot lines of those movies and those novels where the whole story has been built around

one particular person, usually what is known as “the protagonist” (as contrasted with the story’s “antagonist” – THAT word we surely know!), and then - WHAM! – you are introduced to a whole new person, and you thought FOR SURE the author was pointing to your expected protagonist!

There’s a tingle in the hearing or in the reading or in the viewing. The drama is suddenly heightened, and you are drawn further into the story.

Actually, it could be your story we’re talking about. And it could be negative, or positive.

For instance, at your work the person to whose position in the company you have aspired decides to retire. You even talked to that person about helping you be the successor. But – boom - at the office retirement party, the boss introduces the new person to take the vacant position. This brand new person completely changes your whole career scenario, and you are crushed.

In a more positive situation, you are happily going along in life, you get married, and you have plans for the future, and then comes the news - boom - you are pregnant. This brand new person completely changes your whole career scenario, and you are elated. You are surprised and perhaps alarmed about what this means. But you are also elated.

This is something of the scene for us in the Christmas Story. On Sunday, December 23, 2018, and what is known as the 4th Sunday of Advent, you will hear a moment like this.

Let's set the scene leading up to it. As the Christmas Story moves along, we know that an Angel from God visited Mary, and she was told that she was favored or blessed by God to carry out an incredibly important part of what God wanted to do to save and redeem His People from their own ongoing disobedience of Him and His ways, and His resultant death. She would become the mother of the One who had been prophesied to be that savior, redeemer, and who the Jewish prophecies often named as Messiah. So, she says to the Angel, "Yes, I agree to do the Lord's bidding", or more traditionally, "Let it be done to me." All of this was prophesied so many years and centuries before. In that visit from the Angel, we hear that greeting in the Latin text, "Ave, Maria", or "Hail, Mary, full of grace (or, "highly favored one"); that she will bear a child, who, mysteriously and incomprehensibly, the Apostle John would identify as The Word of God, the Son of God, God Himself (John 1:1ff). The angel says in the message to Mary, "you will name him Jesus [*which means "God Saves"*]. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And the Angel also answers Mary's question about how this might be so, since she is not married, and thus she means she has had no conjugal relation, and is not expecting to do so. The Angel tells her that this conception is not going to happen by human means, or as the Apostle John would also say, "[not of the desire or will of man](#)" (John 1:13-14). So, the story has reached very quickly a high level of drama and anticipation, with four, maybe five, very important characters in the story: an Angel from God; Mary, who has received the message, God Himself, a child to be conceived, and another person who will become the baby's Guardian Father on earth.

It is an extraordinary story just as it stands in this telling, so far. And we are left to wait for the child to be born, and see what comes of it all. Our minds and our hearts are engaged by the possibilities, and, like any good story, we find ourselves drawn into it, meaning, the people and the setting those people inhabit.

And then comes the last Sunday before Christmas. Quietly we are reintroduced to Mary, she's now pregnant, and she's on a little trip to the hill country to visit some relatives. It's not time for her baby to be born; it's a very traditional time in the Hebrew culture of being with relatives while in the first trimester of a pregnancy. That's nice. Very healthy respite; very civilized. And then comes this surprising add to the story; and it's not just Mary's cousin Elizabeth. It is the baby in Elizabeth's womb!

As you will hear the story on Sunday, “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.”

Four things suddenly inserted into the story, all positive parts, all FURTHER heightening the Christmas story, all adding the length, the height, the depth., the width, to the glory of the story, as if a sudden shot of story adrenaline -- call it “delight!” -- has just been injected above and beyond where the story has already taken us. And, of course, there is even more to come.

Here are the four things: Mary has family, and that family is now further witness as to what is happening with Mary. This gives strength to the prophecies, and to the validity of Mary’s telling of what took place with the visitation of an angel. The story is truly, truly affirmed.

Second, we now know from whence comes the second piece of what we make use of devotionally, the “Hail Mary.” The first part comes from the Visitation of the Angel; the second part, “Blessed art thou amongst women...” comes from the Visit of Mary to Elizabeth, as Elizabeth has her turn being filled with the Spirit and immediately praising God.

Third, from this visit to Elizabeth we are given that amazing song of praise and devotion and humility known from the Latin as the “Magnificat”, the Song of Mary, which begins, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice within me.” What a jewel of the Christmas story.

And finally, the character of John the Baptist is introduced, not by prophetic word that he will be coming, but in his very existence. It has been said that the first human being besides Mary to recognize the existence of the Messiah, the Son of God in His incarnation was an unborn child, that is, still in the womb, and yet able to discern the presence of others, and in this case, the Son of God.

These are powerful things to consider, both as already being a disciple of Jesus Christ who has come, and will be coming again, but also something to consider if you have not yet believed!

If all you had was a little manger scene, and a romantic notion of somebody's love, your story has now been interrupted and certainly enhanced by so much more! This is a great story – a true story – made even greater. It is exciting to hear it again.

Hope to see you at the Christ Mass. And hope your season is Merry!

Fr. Robert G. Eaton, Interim Rector

Readings for this Sunday – The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Micah 5:2-4 Psalm 80:1-7 Hebrews 10:5-10 Luke 1:30-49, 56

CALENDAR

SUNDAY: The Fourth Sunday of Advent

8:00a Low Mass (Church)

10:30a Solemn High Mass (Church)

—*The entrance to the church is on 6th Avenue*—

Note: Coffee Hour & Fellowship follow the Mass in the Parish Hall.

MONDAY: 7:00p (AA) Doctors' Group (Fireside Room)

Christmas Eve

10:30pm Musical Offering (Church)

11:00pm Solemn Vigil Mass (Church)

12:00am Christmas Cookie Party (Parish Hall)

TUESDAY: **Christmas Day**

10:00am Low Mass with Hymns

FRIDAY: AA Meetings

8:00p Ladies' Group (Fireside Room)

8:15p Men's Group (Parish Hall)