

Fourth Sunday of Advent  
Year C

Micah 5:2-5a  
Canticle 15  
Hebrews 10:5-10  
Luke 1:39-45

This Advent season has been a journey. We have waited, prepared, and rejoiced along with many people. The first Sunday of Advent saw us waiting for both December 25<sup>th</sup> and the coming of Jesus in great power and glory. The second Sunday of Advent saw us joining others in response to the call of John the Baptizer to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of the Lord. Last Sunday, we heard the voice of Paul telling us to rejoice in the Lord always. Today, we take the final steps in preparation for Jesus - we welcome. But, who or what do we welcome today?

Like Elizabeth, many of you will be welcoming family into your homes. Some will have traveled long distances, like Mary, while others may live close at hand. Either way, we welcome them during this festive time. It is important to realize that Elizabeth was welcoming Mary, not Mary's child. We still have time before that welcoming happens. This is a gathering of two women who share a common situation - both are carrying a child who is destined for great things. Both infants were announced to the parents by angels during unexpected times. Elizabeth is old, beyond the age of child-bearing, and Mary is young and not married. For many, both pregnancies would be scandalous. But, they rejoice in being together.

In the reading from the prophet Micah, we see him calling the town of Bethlehem to prepare to welcome a child who will rule in Israel. Yes, their great ancestor, David, was from this village and had been brought from following sheep to become the greatest king of the nation. But, could they expect another? The prophet of God told them to be ready; there was a new king coming into their midst.

In her great hymn to God, Mary proclaims that she is ready to welcome this child. While she probably wondered why she was chosen, and understood the position she was placing Joseph, Mary is ready to fulfill the role in which she has been placed and welcomes all the issues it might bring.

Not only do we have house guests to welcome into our homes, we join with the angels, shepherds, and magi in welcoming our role in this pageant story. We have waited and prepared for the big day. The decorations are up, the house is clean, food is almost ready, and we are all set. Like all of the other people in the story, we also have prepared our hearts to welcome this child. Scripture tells us that our hearts are the Temple of God. Just as we have prepared our homes, we have also prepared this home for God.

How? We have spent time reading God's Word. We have spent time discussing the role of the angels in announcing these great events. We have prayed for our loved ones, and for ourselves, as we remember those who are no longer able to join us at the table. But, most of all, we have prepared a place for Jesus in our hearts - rejoicing in the knowledge that God is with us, even

now in our grief, our joys, and our worries. God did not wait to send Jesus until everything was perfect. But, God sent Him to perfect this very human world.

God now is calling us to welcome this Child into our hearts and lives to be with us in all our trials, all our problems, in all our successes and failures, in all our humanness. Let us open our arms in welcome to this One who is sent to be with us today.