

4th S. of Advent, Yr B.

24-12-17.

He alone is wisdom.

Our second reading today, from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, contains one of the shortest sentences in Scripture, but also one of the most significant. It contains just four words: "God alone is wisdom", and I would like to bring those words home by asking you to use your imagination.

We are all familiar with film-shots taken from outer space, zooming in on planet earth. I'd like you to imagine that, - with the Archangel Gabriel coming from outer space, by-passing the sun and the much larger planets, to come to earth, and there, ignoring the hubs of civilization like Rome, Athens, Cairo and Jerusalem, heading for a dusty little town in Northern Israel, to enter a small dwelling where a young woman is going about her everyday business, - cooking, washing, mending, or spinning wool into thread.

Barely more than a child she is nobody's wife, nobody's mother, but the Angel lands in front of her, and there, in the middle of nowhere, the Angel speaks to the young woman, a societal nobody. The angel asks her to agree to God's plan to change everything, beginning with a child to which she is asked to give birth.

Mary listened to the Angel. She allowed her heart to be vulnerable to God's grace, but at the same time she was level-headed enough to ask how this could be? She was nobody, only betrothed, not yet even a wife, but she was simple enough, open enough to hear that God's plan was bigger than her expectations or even her imagination. Only God would dream up a plan to save humankind from its self-destructive direction, - that would start with her, insignificant Mary of Nazareth. Nudged by the Holy Spirit we know that Mary said YES, and gave birth to the child whose birthday we will celebrate tomorrow, on Christmas Day.

"God alone is wisdom." The plan which the Angel made known to Mary had its urgency in a world that had grown cold with fear, with subjection to brute power, pride and privilege; a world given to injustice, poverty and other forms of evil, - an evil merry-go-round which only one power could undermine and change: the power of love.

We've all experienced how evil begets evil, hurt begets hurt, force is answered with force, dishonesty is met with dishonesty, falsehood with betrayal, and abuse with further abuse.

Love is the only force that can break through that cycle, and that is what God proposed to do. He would send his own Son among us, who, by a change in dynamics would begin the process of change. That's why it started with a young insignificant teenager in a backwater of the Roman Empire, accepting not riches and status, but poverty and a young woman whose only worldly qualifications were the ability to do her household chores.

Mary had just two things in her favour: her innocence and her willingness to be open to God's love and to pass that love on. That's all that God asked her for, - unleashing a power that is still echoing through space and time, and that we are asked to identify ourselves with as well.

Mary's Son showed us how in a two-fold way. First by his willingness to reach out to those in need, physical, material and spiritual, and the Gospels are full of the stories of how he achieved this. And secondly, he did this by his willingness to absorb all the ill will and enmity that the forces of evil could throw at him, even to accepting a most painful and barbarous death on the Cross, - suffered because he could not be unfaithful to the love and the truth he stood for.

Two words spoken from the Cross sum up that life among us, both addressed to his Father: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do", and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit".

Forgiveness, and total commitment to give of himself in love.

And that is what we are invited to commit ourselves to, - to the wisdom of God, as tomorrow or this evening we welcome Mary's child.

God alone is wisdom!