

## Commentary to the 4th Sunday of Advent - C -



The gifts are wrapped, hopefully. The cards are sent and received, except for those we missed. The food for tomorrow is in the fridge. The relatives have arrived, and Mom is trying to keep them out of the fridge. The children are looking up the chimney, and begging Dad not to start a fire no matter how cold it gets. With the children we are all bursting with anticipation.

Is there anything more exciting in our world than children waiting for Santa? Sure there is: a pregnant woman waiting for her little love to be born. Today's Gospel presents two such women. Mary and Elizabeth are bursting with anticipation, with expectation. Mary is a young girl, newly married, with a baby announced by an angel and conceived miraculously. Elizabeth is an older woman, one who thought her chance to have a child had passed. Her baby, conceived naturally, was also announced by an angel, the same angel in fact, Gabriel. The women knew that not just their lives would be changed, but the world would be changed. They greeted each other, and the baby within Elizabeth, the future John the Baptist, recognized the presence of the Messiah within Mary. Elizabeth was overwhelmed with excitement as she realized that her child would have a vital role in God's plan for His people. Both women proclaimed their gratitude to God for working His wonders within them.

Perhaps, as a final preparation for Christmas, we can spend a few moments reflecting on the great Gift

God has given us and focus on the gratitude we owe Him. The great gift of Christmas, of course, is the gift of His Son. The Christian existentialist Soren Kierkegaard told a parable to help explain this gift.

Once upon a time there was a king who was rich and powerful. The King was very unhappy, though. He wanted a wife to be his queen. Now a political marriage could easily have been arranged with another country but that is not what the King wanted. He wanted someone whom he could love and who could love him. Only real love could fill his vast, empty castle and life.

One day the King was riding through the streets of a small village in a remote corner of the kingdom when he came upon the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. He immediately fell in love with her. But there was a problem: she was a peasant girl, and he wanted to win her love, not buy her love.

One of his counselors told him to just command her to be his wife. Any girl, especially a peasant girl, would jump at the opportunity. But the King would not do that. He could not command love. Besides, for the rest of his life he would wonder if she was a loving wife or a loyal subject.

Another counselor told the king to that he should call on the girl as her King, shower her with presents of diamonds and gold and silk gowns, and give her the opportunity to realize that he truly loved her. But the King would not do that. For the rest of his life he would wonder if she loved him or his wealth.

A third counselor told the king to dress as a peasant so she would not be overwhelmed, and gradually reveal his power and position until she was ready to join him in the castle. The king did not like the thought of deceiving her. If their relationship was based on deception, how could she ever love him?

Finally, the King knew what he would do. He renounced his royal robes, his power and authority. He became a peasant in that remote village, living and working and suffering beside the other peasants. After a number of years, he won the heart of the beautiful young girl. He took his new wife to another village in another country, where no one could have guessed who he was. After many years, he became sick, and his loving wife cared for him. He died a peasant, but at his funeral the people looked at his wonderful, caring and in many ways extremely beautiful wife and said, "That man married a queen."

God is the King. He is the Divine Lover. We are the object of His love. Only God would love so much that He would become one of us to win our love. St. Athanasius, an early doctor of the Church, wrote, “Because of his great love for us, Jesus, the Word of God, became what we are in order to make us what he is himself.” (The Incarnation of the Word by St. Athanasius)

This is the mystery that excites us. It is the same mystery that excited Mary and Elizabeth. They realized that they had each in their own way been chosen to be vehicles of God’s plan of love.

Elizabeth’s son, John the Baptist, would point to this Love become flesh. Jesus, Mary’s son, would be this love. We also have been chosen to be part of this plan by the One who loves us and who calls us to make His Love a reality for others.

With deep gratitude we pray: Lord of all love, you have come to us so we can come to you. You have become physical so we can become spiritual. You have embraced us with your Love so we can embrace others with your love. We thank you for choosing us to be part of your plan. We thank you for allowing us to join Mary and Elizabeth in the excitement of your Coming Presence. We ask you now to give us the strength and the courage to proclaim your Presence with our Lives.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino