

Rev. Derek Fairman

4th Sunday of Advent A (Anticipating the Messiah)

One of the ways in which the Virgin Mary is Virgin Daughter Zion is that she was waiting in joyful anticipation for the Messiah. In this way she is related to the whole people, who were eagerly awaiting the coming of the Messiah. All the desires of the people who came before her, all the desires of the Chosen People, all the desires of the nations were within her heart.

There is an important difference between the Virgin Mary and the rest of the people. God had designs for His Chosen People, especially David and his descendants. The kings descended from him did not always obey the Lord, and sometimes did foolish things. They managed to squander many of the good things that the Lord had provided for them. The Chosen People had followed the bad examples of the kings. They had been unfaithful to the Lord, and they looked for redemption and the day whenever the Messiah would restore all that was lost.

The Virgin Mary did not have to look forward to the Messiah because she had committed sin. She did not provide a bad example to others. However, she was a member of the Chosen People, and she was keenly aware of how short the previous generations had come. She looked forward to the Messiah, aware of her own lowliness and dependence upon God. She looked forward to the Messiah, because she looked forward to the glory and splendor of the nation to return, and for God to fulfill all His promises. She looked forward to the time of fulfillment.

Whenever the angel came to her to announce the coming of the Son of God into the world, she understood that this was the Messiah who was coming into the world. She understood that this announcement was not just for her, but for the whole nation, and for every nation. She understood that the Lord's coming would fulfill all the promises that God had previously made. She knew that the time of fulfillment had come.

This fourth Sunday of Advent reminds us of the importance of Mary's perpetual virginity. Mary's virginity represents the deep longing and waiting for the Messiah. We might remember the parable of the ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom: five were wise, and they bought extra oil for the lamps, while five were foolish. This parable was about the end of time, and how the Lord would return. We can look back and see how the Virgin Mary provides an example of waiting. She waits with us for the coming of her Son to earth once more. In the beginning stages of the Church, she taught the other disciples how to wait patiently.

The second Preface for Advent explains that the Virgin Mary waited for the Lord with love beyond all telling. Like all the other Jewish people, she waited for the Messiah in her youth. When the Lord did come down from Heaven, her waiting for the Lord Jesus to arrive for nine months was emblematic of the Chosen People waiting for many centuries for the Lord to fulfill His promises to His people.

The people were aware of their need for a Messiah, for a Chosen One. They saw how the nation had been subjected to foreign powers. They saw how their lives could be cut short, and they could be treated with indignity. They saw how brutal humans could be to each other. They saw the darkness that covered the earth and how many nations fell into superstition and idolatry. They saw how sin multiplied. Their lives were not easy, and they awaited a Savior.

There are two temptations that we have in our own time. Our world is still hurting, and we might be tempted to despair and give up. We think that we have all tried to fix things, but these problems are beyond repair. This kind of despair or giving up takes us away from God. If we lose hope, we lose our faith that God will fulfill His promises about this world and the next world. It is as if we do not believe that God is leading this world, that He has no providence in this world, which eventually leads us to question whether God is there or cares about us.

The other temptation is to isolate ourselves from the sufferings of this world. We can look at the world around us and be indifferent to the sufferings of others. We can make every effort to obtain all that we need, and thereby not really think that we need any kind of help from anyone, or that we depend upon anyone. We always depend upon God for everything, but still, we may think that we have no need for a Savior, because we do not see any need for one. We are doing just fine without one.

Of course, isolating ourselves from the sufferings of others is not a long-term solution, and we must keep in mind that the Lord is still saving us even when we do not sin, by preventing us from falling into sin, when we would do so without His help. Our following the commandments ought to lead us to gratitude, not pride. We know our own weaknesses, and we look forward to the day whenever the Lord will bring all to completion and perfection.

As we approach the altar, we ask the Lord to help us know the desires of our hearts. Some of the desires of our hearts will not be fulfilled, because they are against God's commands. Some of our desires will be fulfilled in the next life, and we ask God to fill our hearts with hope. We ask the Lord to help us imitate the Virgin Mary, who shows us how to patiently wait in hope.