

Sunday Thought

19th December 2021 Fourth Sunday of Advent

Readings

Micah 5: 2 – 5a

Psalm 80: 1 - 7

Hebrews 10: 5 - 10

Luke 1: 39 - 55

Christmas Romance

The reading from the prophecy of Micah was written about seven hundred years before Jesus was born. Micah came from the Judaeen hill country. He shared the romance of past history in the rugged hills, valley pastures and pine forests of his homeland. A land often tortured by war, famine, and oppressive foreign occupation, it was still romantically the place of green pastures and refreshing waters which king David had once known, near Bethlehem. Worship and agricultural trades linked it to nearby Jerusalem. Micah had a message of hope from God. Looking beyond present national troubles the Lord gives assurance of times of peace and prosperity which will return with the advent of new King – a Messiah from these hills – from the family line of David. God's people lived with the romantic hope of that promise for seven centuries. Then Jesus came!

For twenty more centuries we have lived with the romantic Gospel of Jesus. Much of his life was spent in more open country some sixty miles north of Bethlehem. My thoughts today are there in Nazareth and about a personal romance between Mary, the young daughter of Ann and a carpenter who was a little older than her. We know little about Joseph, except that, like Mary he was a man of deep religious faith. I can understand him being attracted to Mary and falling in love with her, despite some competition no doubt!



The reading from Luke gives us a penetrating insight into the character of the young woman whom God chose to be the mother of his Son – the Christ. She obviously had to be someone special to nurture Jesus, to guard him, to comfort him, to lead him close to his heavenly Father and to suffer grievously with him. Luke tells how, very soon after a visit from an angel, Mary, overwhelmed, excited, scared, needed to share her experience with religious-minded kin. Opportunity comes when she hears of Elizabeth's pregnancy. She made the dangerous journey south into the hills to stay with her until John was born.

Elizabeth, the devout and devoted wife of the Temple priest Zechariah, was thrilled to hear Mary's news. *'How blessed you are and how privileged to believe the Lord's word!'* she exclaimed. The key to understanding Mary is in her response to Elizabeth. It has become one of the Church's most treasured songs – the Magnificat. She sang of her real, excited faith that God, who is almighty, has chosen someone so insignificant as her. Her song expressed the joy which was already part of her daily life – at home - in the village - with the women of the Nazareth synagogue and in the markets. The joy of a happy, devout village lass. There was much more to Mary though. She sings of God who is mighty and holy, faithful and kind, but also merciful and just. Bearing in mind the troubled times in which she lived and that an international trade route along which Roman armies marched ran nearby, she seems to be outspoken about corrupt religion and powerful, aggressive rulers; about the beggars in the town streets; ostracism of the chronic sick; about the hungry who so often came to her home for food. In today's terms I can imagine Mary at the centre of the protest group, actively involved in the foodbank and worrying openly about tales of savage cruelty close to home. It may seem a far cry from the gentle girl in blue on our Christmas cards, but I am sure I know why Joseph was in love with her!

Sure, too why she was chosen to be our Lord's mother. The facts of Mary's song are the substance of much of Jesus' teaching. He would learn from her. There was one important lesson she shared - about obedience to God the Father. Her words to an angel – *'I'm the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you say.'* are echoed in Jesus' Gethsemane prayer – *'This is the cup I have been given. Shall I not drink it?'* The Hebrews reading confirms that for us. The writer proclaims that the whole world may find salvation because Jesus said, *'Lord, I am here to do your will.'*

**Christmas is the world's greatest romance,
When, with God, Joseph fell in love with Mary!**



A Prayer (with Psalm 80 in mind)

Glorious Lord and King, shepherd of your people, bring us back into your fold.
You hear our prayers. We trust your strength.
We are safe because you are with us.
We will follow you, wherever you want us to be and whatever you want us to do.



A very happy Christmas to faithful readers of Sunday Thought



May Jesus himself give you all the blessings of his coming

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