

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 24, 2023

We will be back here in a very short time to celebrate Christmas, so as Advent enters its final hours, I simply want to urge you to watch for how Jesus will reveal Himself to you in the next few days, in ways you will not expect. In fact, one of the strong themes that emerges from all of God's revelation is to "*expect the unexpected*," for God has often chosen the least likely, the most unforeseeable people and events, to bring salvation.

*"And you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah ... from you shall come forth for Me one Who is to be ruler."* A promise long-forgotten by Jesus' time is remarkably fulfilled, even where Bethlehem's inns have no room. *How does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*" Elizabeth is amazed at her own pregnancy with John the Baptist and even more that her cousin Mary bears the Redeemer within her. Mary herself says, *"How can this be"* – this announcement that she was to be the Mother of God? Why does the Savior and Lord of the universe appear among us in the weakest and most vulnerable way: beginning as an embryo, growing in Mary's womb; then an infant, almighty yet helpless; born in material poverty but infinitely rich in the hidden glory of His divinity? If God has done these things, what else might God choose to make Himself present in our world?

God tells us through Isaiah that His ways are not our ways, His thoughts are not our thoughts. *This is our enduring hope, that God can still do something new.* In Jesus, Mary and Joseph and the shepherds and the Magi saw God with a human face. We too enter this mystery of God's mercy through the Body Jesus took on for us – the Body He offered on the Cross – the very same Body that is about to be given to us in the Eucharist. Maybe we are tempted to think ... why should He care about me? What could happen in such a troubled world today that would really matter? Who am I that the Lord should come to me? But being unlikely or unexpected is simply a reminder that God is greater than even our best thoughts and highest ideals. Since Jesus came for ALL, each of us can know that He also came for ME. That makes our lives of infinite importance and value, for Mary is right: God's mercy is the same, from age to age.