

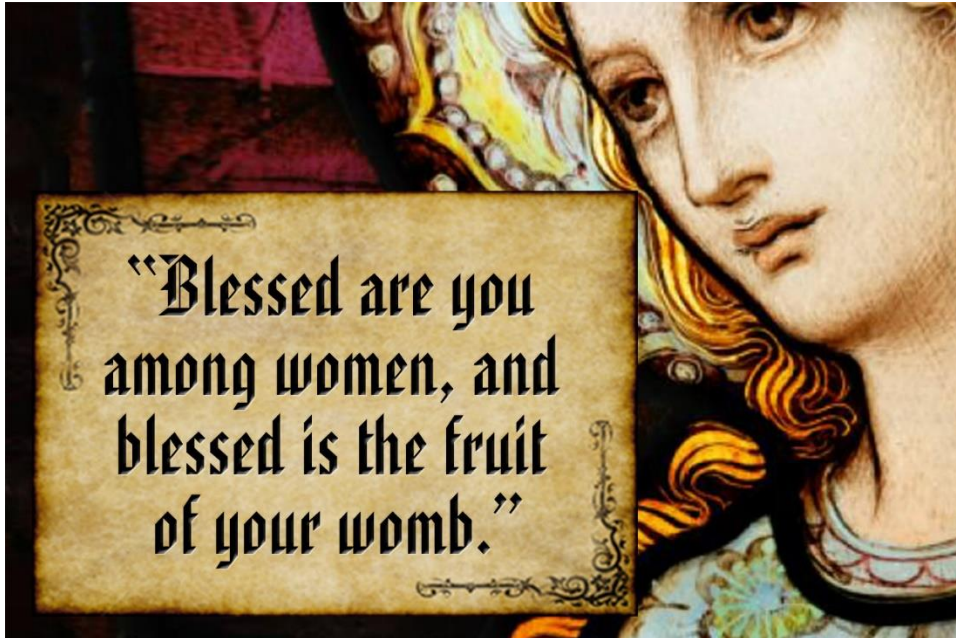
## 4th Sunday of Advent – on the Gospel

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Micah 5:1-4

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45



### The Perfect Gift

Little Anita has a very busy father. He is a dot-com technocrat who makes a lot of money but has little time to be with his family. Every night, however, Anita insists that her father read her a story before she would go to sleep. This continued for some time until the man found a "solution." He bought Anita a colourful kid's tape player and made a tape of her favorite stories in the story book. Whenever, therefore, the child asks him to read her a story he would simply push the button and play back the tape-recorded stories. Anita took that for a few days and then revolted and refused to accept the stories on tape. "Why," asked the father, "the tape reads the stories as good as I do!" "Ya," replied the little girl, "But I can't sit on his laps."

One thing that is associated with the celebration of Christmas everywhere is giving. Christmas is the feast of giving. Christmas is the one time in the year when everyone is sure to give and receive a present, even if be only a Christmas card. People spent a lot of time and money shopping for the perfect Christmas gift. We put up Christmas trees to surprise family members with our gifts and to be surprised with theirs. Santa Claus is the perfect symbol of Christmas because Santa is the one who gives and gives and never gets tired of giving. Christmas is a feast of giving even from God's point of view. For at Christmas, we celebrate the mystery that **"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that**

**everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”** (John 3:16). God gives, and the people of God give, and that is Christmas.

If Christmas is the feast of giving, then the question of what to give and how to give becomes very important. After all what is worth doing is worth doing well. How can we improve on the quality of our giving? How can we improve on the quality of our Christmas celebration? Today’s Gospel reading helps us to answer some of these questions.

In today’s Gospel we read the story of Mary visiting with Elizabeth. What gift did Mary bring to Elizabeth? We are not told that she brought foodstuff, although she might as well have brought some. We are told she brought just one thing: herself. She gave Elizabeth the gift of her very presence. And, dear friends, this is the best and the hardest gift of all. It is easy to send flowers, it is easy to send a parcel, but to give the gift of ourselves, to make out the time to be with somebody, that is the gift that many people long for but do not receive at Christmas. Anita’s father gave his little girl a costly tape recorder and made tapes for her, but he did not give her himself, his presence, his time.

Following Mary’s example in today’s Gospel story, we must, in addition to the flowers and parcels, give of ourselves, our presence, our time. We must find the time to visit and be with people. This is the greatest gift because its value cannot be calculated in terms of money.

Another point we can make out of Mary’s gift to Elizabeth is that one should give not according to one’s convenience but according to the needs of the receiver. It was not convenient for Mary to travel the lonely, dangerous road from Galilee to the hills of Judea. It was certainly for her an uphill task. But Elizabeth needed a helping hand. She was six months pregnant and would no longer be able to go and draw water from the village well, to look after the crops in her garden and the animals in her farm, she would no longer be able to go to the market to do her shopping. So Mary, as soon as she learned that Elizabeth was six months pregnant went with haste and stayed with her for about three months, meaning, until she gave birth. Mary gave to Elizabeth what she needed when she needed it. That is the perfect gift.

Do you know one thing everybody needs today? Everybody needs encouragement. Everybody needs the interior peace and joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. This is what Mary’s visit did for Elizabeth. Mary’s visit was an inspiration to Elizabeth. When we visit people this Christmas, let us try to bring some inspiration into their lives, let us seek to bring them closer to God, and let us try to share with them the Spirit of God in us, the Spirit of consolation, of courage, of peace and joy, just as Mary did.

AMEN.