

4th Sunday in Advent

Parishioner Homily by

Janet Ferree

December 21, 2008



Reading I [2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16](http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel7.htm#v1)
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Reading II [Rom 16:25-27](http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab/bible/romans/romans16.htm#v25) (<http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab/bible/romans/romans16.htm#v25>)

Gospel [Lk 1:26-38](http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab/bible/luke/luke1.htm#v26) (<http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab/bible/luke/luke1.htm#v26>)

Good morning. My name is Janet Ferree. Once again I've been given the honor and opportunity to give the homily on this 4th Sunday of Advent. Father Jon's homilies, as we know very well, are *extremely* adept at keeping matters of social justice at the forefront of the liturgies and searing them into our minds until they smoke. Mine won't.

I brought good news with me this morning!! Do you realize that if you include today, there are still 4 more shopping

days until Christmas! Many of us, including myself, forget Christmas is a Holy-day and celebrate Santa Claus and his elves instead of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. We pay homage to Toys R Us and venerate Starbucks. We decorate our trees with fancy lights and ornaments, and top them with a plug-in star. Family and friends are to arrive soon.

The pressure is on to buy gifts—many of which will be cast aside in a few weeks, as my garage can testify. Year after year we succumb to marketing hypes and brave the pre-dawn pilgrimages to the local Mall for those *must-haves* on our family's Christmas lists. Long before Good Morning America begins store shelves are being ravaged, leaving the remainder of the year's hottest items mangled under fake snow.

What happened to the joy and magic of Christmas?

The only joy left for *me* is savoring that eggnog latte at Sears on Christmas Eve, watching the annual *Husband's*

Shopping Marathon play out right before my eyes. What a sight to behold! It's madness is similar to the running of the bulls, but with a tool department. The magic I find happens when their carts quickly fill to the brim, without *once* looking at what they've put into them.



So then, how can we recover true Christmas spirit and anticipate the coming of **Jesus** in a holy way when electronics, television commercials, computer pop-ups and Anti-Matter Turbo Annihilators (not suitable for children under 3 years of age) capture our attention more than the stories and experiences surrounding our faith...unless they can be rented from Netflix?

This season is particularly difficult for many people, so how can we *celebrate* the impending birth of Jesus with joyful expectation when it's almost *illegal* to say ...

Merry Christmas!



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Where is the peace on earth and good will towards humankind when some of us forced to live in garages because our jobs were out-sourced? Where is faith when our Christmas trees are bare and have no gifts under it?

I think we can recapture the spirit if we look closely at Mary's openness and trust as witnessed in scripture.



We just heard in Luke's Gospel about an angel delivering the news to Mary that she had found favor with God. As such she was given the exalted honor of giving *her* flesh to the Son of God. Mary's simple faith and innocence allowed her to surrender her body to the will of God and *together, with God, create* the *One* who would bring the gift of salvation into human history.

A little further in Luke, just after her visit to Elizabeth when she feels the unborn Jesus leap in her womb the moment Elizabeth recognizes it as "her lord", is Mary's proclamation of

faith and joy. You may know it as the Canticle of Mary, or more commonly, the **Magnificat**. I like this song because in it Mary not only rejoices in God for elevating her status to the point of being Blessed for all ages, but also because it's a poem that reminds us that God can be counted on in a world gone mad; a world such as ours today. It reads like this:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
behold, from now on all ages will call me blessed.

The Mighty One has done great things for me;
and holy is his name.

His mercy is from age to age
To those who fear him.

He has shown might with his arm,
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.

He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones,
But lifted up the lowly.

The hungry he has filled with good things;
The rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped Israel his servant,
Remembering his mercy,
According to his promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

For me, the **Magnificat** reinforces the faith I need to live through difficult times. It sets me on-track for a more spiritual appreciation of this holy season when I might otherwise feel anxious and overwhelmed. I am consoled when Mary remembers that God truly knows each of us well and understands the troubles each generation must deal with. After proclaiming the joy she feels from carrying the child of God, the song reaffirms God's freely given mercy offered to those who humbly seek it; a mercy which must be passed along to others.

The **Magnificat** shows us that our problems today are the same as those 2000 years ago with uncaring political rulers,

financial hardships and high taxes, linking us as spiritual brothers and sisters that *transcend time*. And it offers strength to face our difficulties with an underlying calm that comes only from trusting in God—as Mary did when approached by the angel.

Have
Faith
in
GOD

As though she were speaking of what's happening today where greed has forced small shops to close, sending employees away with no medical insurance and little hope of a secure future, Mary sings to us of God casting aside those who are arrogant of mind and heart, giving us all a warning of what can

happen if the arrogant persevere and ignore the consequences of their actions. This act of God is a **gift**.

In today's world the **Magnificat** can give testimony to what will happen to those who dwell in the realm of privilege, **powerful** people whose financial empires are built off of the backs of the lowest-level workers. As we see great financial empires crashing one after another, taking our jobs and investments with them, we can see the arm of God exposing the deceitful, and throwing the rulers from their thrones, allowing God to lift the lowly to a higher dignity, a dignity not bought but given, as a *gift*.

To those who hunger for Jesus' love, peace and closeness, *they* will be satisfied, because these are unaffected by worldly events; they are free to all people who seek them with honesty and humility. No person or organization can take them away.

They are a gift.



Finally, Mary ends with a message of calm; she makes it clear that God doesn't go back on his promises, that we can rest assured we have not been abandoned in our times of need.

Perhaps it is possible to look at this economic crisis as *another* gift from God, one that releases us from earthly distractions and power to refocus our minds on what is truly worthy of possessing. Perhaps feeling the bite of fewer dollars in our pockets provides us a way out of the traps set for us to make rampant unnecessary purchases resulting from advertisement hypnosis. Perhaps now *we* are the ones being elevated to a higher dignity by being given God's arm to sweep

aside those who make gains off of our losses and secure protection from those who are supposed to protect us.

These words aren't going to find us a job, or put a roof over our heads or food on our tables. They won't make our illnesses go away or restore our lost investments. They are not a safety net. Words seldom are. Being pregnant before marriage, Mary wasn't spared the comments of her time or given exemption from rabbinic laws. She wasn't spared persecution, homelessness or being hunted down in order to kill the blessed child she carried. What I'm hoping these words *will* do is provide us with the same expectations that Mary rejoiced so much about, and invite us to share in her trust of God. I'm hoping they will give us comfort that better times *really are* laying ahead.

So whether in the physical sense there is no tree and no presents this year, we must try to take solace in Christmas as it

was meant to be. Lying not far from the surface of our hearts can be found our *spiritual* Christmas tree. It is filled with those wonderful gifts from God mentioned above, gifts necessary to welcome and nurture the Christ child, and to bring us closer to understanding that tremendous event that took place. Decorate this tree with faith, hope, and truth. Crown it with the glorious light of Jesus—that ever-brilliant Light of the World, and let the glow warm your soul as you recover the **true**...



Spirit of Christmas.

Janet Ferree is the Mass Coordinator for the Sunday, 11:30 am liturgy at St. Julie Billiard Parish in San Jose, California.