

Read



Micah 5:1-4a

Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16,
18-19

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45

LIVING THE WORD

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 23, 2018



REFLECTION

Sometimes life can seem very disappointing and without instruction. We question why bad things happen and how to make sense of God's will. Readings like those we heard at today's Mass, offer us hope for our lives, especially when we try to make sense of things! First, we hear the prophet Micah predicting that the Savior of the world will come from Bethlehem. In the Gospel, Elizabeth tells Mary she is blessed because she believed that the Lord's Word is true and that he would fulfill it. Mary's steadfastness in her belief in the Lord is a model for our own lives. God promised Mary that she would be the mother of the Savior—this came true. He promised the Israelites that he would bring them a Savior—he fulfilled that promise. God also has a dream—and a will—for each of our lives. It may be a different dream than what we expect or long for right now but God's dream for us is every bit as real as the promises he made to Mary and the Israelites. Discerning what he intends for us will make us happy beyond anything we could plan for ourselves.



ACTION

Putting your hope in God and then discerning his dream for your life takes time. If you are just starting to discern your vocation, it's unlikely you will have answers immediately. Instead, begin by asking yourself the right questions. Research a few religious orders by talking to a member of that order, or by looking up their website. Some examples of orders are the Benedictines, Jesuits, Carmelites, Dominicans, Franciscans, and the Sisters of Life. You could also talk to a priest about what his life is like or contact the vocations office in your diocese. Write down your thoughts and take them to prayer. The most important thing is to be open, just as Mary was open, to whatever God calls you to do.



Check out this website to help you find religious communities for men and women:

www.pathsoflove.com/religiou-communities.html

? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What kind of a person do you want to become?
- ❖ What do you think of the possibility of becoming a priest, deacon, religious brother or sister, or single or married person? In what way do you think God is calling you?
- ❖ Do you doubt God's presence in your life, or do you believe that he has a plan and a future for you?
- ❖ In which areas of your faith do you need to be strengthened? Do you really believe that God can bring about anything?



December 23, 2018

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LECTIONARY #12C

Micah 5:1-4a

Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

As we prepare to experience the Word of God this week, we take our journey of trust one level deeper. We learn that God is not expecting sacrifices from us. We are reminded that if we turn our face to God, we will be saved! God is our guide, our light, our way. We only need to trust and follow him. Then, we will be ready to say yes to God in a way we may never had thought possible. This Sunday's Gospel story of the Visitation focuses on the person who trusted in God perhaps more than anyone else—Mary. She trusted, she followed, and she received exactly what she needed.

Q FOCUS: *To trust in God.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

This Fourth Sunday of Advent marks the shortest possible week in Advent. Tomorrow is the Vigil of the Nativity of the Lord. Santa Claus comes to mind as kids and teens think of Christmas Time, gifts, ribbons, and ornamented trees. Families begin preparing weeks in advance. Retailers start months ahead. Family traditions preserve special recipes of sweets and chocolates enjoyed only during this liturgical time. Even with the massive influx of nonreligious objects infused into this time by a secular society, many communities and families retain a strong sense of its core: Christmas remembers God's gift of his son Jesus who comes as the savior of the world. This is so important

to the life of the Church, that it takes an entire season, not just as day (as in our secular culture), to celebrate.

Church Teaching Connection

"Indeed, at the Annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the 'full submission of intellect and will,' manifesting 'the obedience of faith' to him who spoke to her through his messenger. She responded, therefore, with all her human and feminine 'I,' and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with 'the grace of God that precedes and assists' and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who 'constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts'" (*Redemptoris mater*, 13).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 1:39-45

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, / "Blessed are you among women, / and blessed is the fruit of your womb. / And how does this happen to me, that

the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

The theme again this week is to trust in God. Note the image presented in today's psalm refrain: “Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.” (Since only the Gospel was proclaimed at today's session, you may need to recap the other Scripture readings for the teens.) Imagine that a simple turning of our face to God gives us the powerful gaze we need to be saved! Think of what it feels like when you turn your face toward the sun. The sun doesn't decide whether or not it will shine on you based on what you have done or not done. The sun shines on you because that is the nature of the sun. God shines on us because that is the nature of God. God does not withhold love from us because of our actions. Thinking of God in that way is like us creating God in the image of a human, rather than humans being created in the image of God! In our flawed humanity, we are sometimes unreliable, not capable of unconditional love. God, however, is not only capable of it—God IS it!

► **What does God want from you?**

► **What is it that God expects from you?**

Sometimes I think it would be easier if there were an exact list of things God wanted from us. However, that is not how life works, and it is certainly not how God works. We are given the gift of free will and have to make choices in our lives. If

things were laid out for us in a black and white fashion, there would be no opportunities for us to grow. God wants us to grow and he supports us in that process.

We do learn from our readings today that God does not want burnt offerings, holocausts, or sacrifice from us. I think our answer as to what God wants from us comes from the Gospel, from the example of Mary, the person who trusted in him the most. When the angel brought Mary the amazing message that she would be the mother of God's Son, he also brought her some family news: her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, was going to have a baby as well. Immediately, Mary set out to visit her cousin and help her at what must have been a challenging time. When Mary arrived, something amazing happened: the child in Elizabeth's womb leapt up in recognition, and Elizabeth, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit and realized that Mary was carrying God's Son.

► **How do you think Mary felt throughout this experience?**

► **Why do you think Mary chose to visit her cousin Elizabeth?**

Mary, in her wisdom, travels to visit her cousin Elizabeth after God prompted her to do so. God knew what she needed and gave her that gentle “nudge.” It was still her choice, and she chose to follow that nudge . . . that light, which lit her path all the way to Elizabeth! Traveling alone as a young pregnant woman could not have been easy.

► **Have you ever traveled alone? (Mary was likely with another family or families, but was not with her own family.)**

► **In what ways do you think it was harder or easier for Mary to travel alone?**

When Mary arrived, she received the welcome and the understanding from her cousin that she so needed. Elizabeth understood. Elizabeth believed. God knew what Mary needed and led her there. Mary gave the one and only thing God expects from us. She gave her yes.

► **In what ways do we say yes to God?**

It took trust for Mary to be able to say yes to God. Trusting in God illuminated her path, even at those times when she had no idea which direction the path was going to lead.

- ▶ Do you do difficult things because you know they are the right thing to do?
- ▶ Do you follow where God leads?
- ▶ Do you trust that if you just keep your gaze on God you too shall be “saved”?

Mary trusted. Mary responded with that trust. Mary received exactly what she needed. God didn't fail her and God never fails us either.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the “Church Teaching Connection” on page 96.

Trust in God. That is the theme we have seen in every week of Advent, the season of hope. There is a very strong connection between the two. Trust is necessary in order for us to have hope.

Mary said yes. We too are called to say yes to God so that God can lead us and guide us along our path.

Act on the Word

Stay the Path: Part IV

You will need construction paper, pens, markers, scissors, and old magazines for this activity. See the directions on page XX.

Revisit the paths teens have created. Ask:

- ▶ On this, the last Sunday of Advent, what can you add to your path?
- ▶ In what way have you allowed God to be your light?
- ▶ In what way, going forward, can you say yes to God and trust that God will care for you on your journey?

Think back on your journey this Advent. Look at the path you created and the examples of times you allowed God to be your guide, your light. (*Teachers, catechists, and youth ministers should provide a safe place for the teens to share honest and open answers.*)

- ▶ In what ways have you grown in your trust in God?
- ▶ In what way was it challenging to trust?
- ▶ Were their situations where you just were not able to trust God?

Remind teens about the visualization exercise they did last week (see page 94). Ask them to share about this experience.

- ▶ How did you feel?
- ▶ Can you continue this practice of turning over your worries to Jesus?

Note to teens: Our worries often disturb our ability to sleep. If you cannot completely surrender your worries, at least consider turning them over to God while you sleep!

Closing Prayer

Loving God,
you establish the world in your goodness
and sustain it in your care.
May these last days of Advent find us ready
to receive you into our hearts.
Open our hearts in love!
May we always serve you in faith.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

For the Masses of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

To help teens prepare for Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. The next session will be about the readings from the Mass during the Night (Midnight Mass) of Christmas. Remind teens that Christmas is a Holyday of Obligation. Make sure teens have the Christmas Mass schedule and encourage them to attend Mass with family or friends.