

bAdvent 4 ~ December 18, 2011 ~ A homily preached by Erl G. Purnell at Old St. Andrew's church, Bloomfield, CT

2 Samuel 7.1-11, 16; Psalm 89.1-4,19-26; Romans 16.25-27; Luke 1.26-38

The Bread Basket Bakery on Whitney Avenue in Hamden is a particularly nice place to stop for a quick lunch. Their soups are tasty and hot, and their muffins fresh but never too sweet. When I lived in New Haven, I used to go there on Fridays I because that's the day they make spinach bread.

Once, around Christmas time, as I stood waiting to order, I looked around their small space. There was a single holiday decoration. Just one. It was a pretty poster, maybe 12 X 16, placed right in the middle of a long white wall. The only thing on the wall. The border was a wide green and gold pattern, and the italicized letters were also gold on a green chevron. The whole poster was simple and yet elegant. So was the message which simply read, "*Jesus is the reason for the season.*"

Jesus is the reason for the Season. Standing there, something inside of me leaped and I got that feeling that comes when I understand something fully and completely even though there are no words to explain or describe just what it is. I felt a sudden warmth, and having just closed the door on a freezing day, the physical sensation that noontime was heightened all the more.

The eloquent message on the lovely poster sang out *INCARNATION*. It was personal and so much like St. Luke's description of Mary's visit by the angel Gabriel.

Mary's startled. More than startled. She's frightened. Well, I guess so. The messenger—Gabriel—invites a pretty deep breath, and the message is not just your ordinary text or email from a friend. 'Don't be afraid...' 'You've got to be kidding! Gonna get pregnant?! STOP. This is not good news.' The girl is only 13 or 14. "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Good question. Really good question.

Young Mary hears out the angel. 'Nothing is impossible with God and to prove it, even your barren cousin Elizabeth is 6 months pregnant.' Mary is overwhelmed. Who wouldn't be? 'OK, God. Have your way,' she says. What choice does she have? 'Here am I. I can't fight this or change it so let it be with me according to your Word.'

Yikes. Isn't it easy to forget that Jesus is the reason for the Season?

One night in New Haven—a 10° degree December night like we haven't seen yet this year—I went shopping at Macy's. As I drove home with bags full of gifts, I had to stop at a light downtown. Across the street by the City Hall a man—a homeless man—walked slowly toward the curb. He was bundled up in one of those Eskimo hooded coats and seemed to be doing OK considering the cold and the wind-chill. And then I wondered how long that night would seem for him. What would he be doing to keep going when it was 1 a.m. Sleeping on the street on a night like that would be almost certain death. Where would he be when it was 4:30 in the morning? Probably not having coffee at Dunkin Donuts. And just at sunrise, a full eight hours away, how would the new day look to him?

That night I made a decision. In addition to whatever gifts I would give to my family and friends (we actually don't give individual gifts any more), I would also give each of them a note saying that money had been sent in their name to a charity.

When Dennis Desrochers read his story about Christmas at our *Tidings of Comfort & Joy* last week, I was reminded of my own encounter with the need to help the less fortunate and, again, I was really touched.

The best we can do at Christmas time is to remember what this is all about. I just don't want to forget that it was to a poor, homeless couple that Jesus was born.

So for me again this year, I'm remembering that the hope and rejoicing of Advent and Christmas itself come face to face in our own time with homelessness, hunger, and unemployment. To believe truly in the *INCARNATION*—that Jesus is the reason for the Season—I cannot but believe that God acts in the world, especially in small ways through you and me. Indeed, *Jesus is the reason for the season.*

*Amen.*