

4th Sunday of Advent – The Incarnation:-

Read Matthew chapter 1, verses 18 – 25 and Luke chapter 1, verse 39 – 56.

A careful reading of the Magnificat, said or sung in Evening Prayer before the Reading from the New Testament, reminds us again of the promises of the old Testament. *“He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”* (Luke chapter 1, verses 54 – 55). See also the study for Advent 2.

Remember that the ‘promise to Abraham goes right back to Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 – 3. This promise was repeated to Isaac, Genesis chapter 26, verses 2 – 5 and to Jacob, Genesis chapter 28, verses 10 – 14.

Now, with the birth of the child expected by Mary, the promises will at last be fulfilled. Now *“there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord”* - see Luke chapter 1, verse 45.

The following members of the family of Mary are named in the above Readings:-

Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah:- The mother and father of John the Baptist. Zechariah was an active priest on the Temple rota (Luke chapter 1, verses 8 – 10). Elizabeth is named as *“the kinswoman”* of Mary, (Luke chapter 1, verse 36). There must have been a close relationship between the two women for Mary go and share the news of the angel’s message. Note that there is nothing in scripture about Mary’s parents or immediate family. This visit to ‘cousin / aunt’ Elizabeth led to a confirmation of the angel’s message and must have been a great encouragement to Mary as she faced telling her immediate family and her betrothed husband that she was pregnant! Note that Mary stayed with Elizabeth *“for about three months”*. That would be until Elizabeth’s baby was due, (Luke chapter 1, verses 36 and 56).

Joseph:- Again we know little detail about Joseph’s family background. We are given two different names for the father of Joseph. That in Matthew chapter 1, verse 16 can be taken as the legal name showing the descent of the Lord Jesus from King David. It may be that Luke (see chapter 3, verses 23 – 38) lists the family tree according to Mary. In reading these Gospels remember that Matthew drew his information from the family of Joseph (perhaps through James, the brother of the Lord). Luke obtains his information from Mary, so there were two different accounts.

More important is the attitude of Joseph to the devastating news that his dear betrothed was expecting a child! Mary returned home from the visit to Elizabeth three months pregnant. The reaction of Joseph to the revelation by the angel, in a dream, meant that he was willing and able to act as earthly father to Jesus. Essential in the culture at that time! And reading further on in the Gospel of Matthew Joseph was open to the warning given, again in a dream, to flee from the infanticide planned by Herod – Matthew chapter 2, verses 13 – 23.

Mary:- Leaving aside the many legends regarding the life of Mary the mother of Jesus, we know very little of her family history and background. That she was chosen by the Almighty Father, *“having found favour with God”* is sufficient for us to say with her kinswoman Elizabeth *“Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”*. The words of the Magnificat, repeated in our Evening Prayer, is a reminder that we along with Mary can rejoice in God our Saviour.

This Christmas time, among all the glitter and festivities let us remember the promises made to us, and to the People of God everywhere, thanking our Father God for the salvation wrought for us through the life, death and resurrection of the Babe of Bethlehem, Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

“And the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.”

The Gospel of John chapter 1, verse 14.