

Daily Visitation

The Fourth Sunday of Advent. Year B, RCL. December 18, 2011. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

On any particular Sunday, we pray a special prayer called the collect just before the Scripture readings. Today's collect went like this:

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

On this, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we hear the story of the Annunciation (which is a fancy word for announcement) in which the angel Gabriel declares to Mary that she has been selected as the vehicle for the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. Gabriel declares that the Holy Spirit will “come upon” Mary and she will become pregnant with a male child, to be named Jesus.

The collect for today rings an interesting change on this. It asks God to visit us daily, presumably in prayer, so that we may be morally prepared in reflection, judgment and intention—in everything that is meant by “conscience”—to receive Jesus. As Mary was an exemplary person and so fit to bear and nurture the divine child, so we are to be prepared to welcome Jesus as if each of us were his particular habitation on earth.

This notion that each Christian reflects, and in his or her moral transformation recapitulates, the Holy Spirit engendering the earthly image of Almighty God in Mary, is well worth our contemplation as we draw near to the Feast of the Nativity of

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, commonly known as Christmas. Every human being bears God's stamp, God's image, and in Jesus this is renewed, restored, re-engendered, reborn.

The best gift of this holiday season, it seems to me, is the assurance that every day is the day when God stands poised to visit us decisively, to act substantially and effectively to renew his life in our lives—or our lives in his life: same thing, in the end. Will we say yes, as Mary did? Will our hearts lift in song, as hers did? Will we be glad that he is coming, glad that he is stepping through the door we have opened to him, glad that he is steeping us in his grace and truth, this day and every day? Will we meet him in prayer, not being afraid but letting him infuse, instill, inspire the peace and joy which no darkness can overcome?

By reciting the collect for today, we have just answered these questions in the affirmative, as we do whenever we recite the Baptismal Covenant. Whether we pay attention to it or not, we Christians are soaked in the water of new life every day. The more eagerly we receive this daily visitation, cooperating with the Holy Spirit, the clearer Jesus' light will shine through us, for the life of the world.