

## 4th Sunday Advent A

A kindergarten teacher told her students the story of the shepherds and the three wise men. Then she said, "Now tell me, who was the first to know about the birth of Jesus?" Immediately, a little girl said, "Mary." Yes, It was Mary. If the same question were asked of a group of adults, perhaps we would think of some complicated answers. We tend to associate God with the spectacular or the extraordinary. So much so, that we fail to notice God's presence and action in the ordinary events of our lives. Conception and child birth are ordinary events that have been there from the beginning of humanity. Yet, it was using those ordinary events that the Messiah came to this world.

The gospel of today begins with the verse, "This is how the birth of Jesus, the messiah, came about." For an ordinary Jew of Jesus' time, this was a bizarre statement. Because they believed that the messiah would not be born the ordinary way. They were aware of the prophecy that the messiah would come from Bethlehem. But how? No one knew. They expected the messiah to drop suddenly from the sky full grown in all his divine regalia and power. Jesus did not meet those expectations of the people. That is one of the reasons why the Jews rejected Jesus. So we hear people saying in Jn. 7: 27, "We know his father and mother. We know where he comes from; but when the messiah comes no one will know where he is from." They found the ordinary ways of God's presence and action among His people too simple to be true.

About 500 years before the birth of Jesus, Prophet Isaiah prophesied the coming of the messiah as we heard in today's first reading. "The virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall name him Emmanuel." So the messiah was to come to this world through a simple, ordinary event of human birth. He is Emmanuel—God with us. The Jews had their expectations of the messiah. What are our expectations? The gospel of today reminds us that Jesus is Emmanuel. He is with us always. Are we able to recognize God's presence and action in our lives? God does not necessarily make His presence known to us or communicate to us, or lead and guide us through the clouds with lightning and thunder. Every time when the ordinary event of a child birth happens, God communicates to us. His presence is revealed.

God comes to us in the people we meet. A few years ago when I was the priest in La Pine, I had come to Bend to see a parishioner in the hospital. I always take Holy Communion with me, but this time I had forgotten. I realized it only after I had reached the hospital, and I was upset with myself. Anyway, while I was talking to the patient, I apologized that I did not have Communion with me. Then as I was coming out of the room, a man passing by asked, "Are you the priest from La Pine?" I said, "Yes." He said he was a Eucharistic minister from St. Francis Parish taking Communion to the patients. Then I checked his list to see if the patient I just visited was on it. He was not. So I invited him into the room of this patient, and I was able to give him Communion. It is not an extraordinary event. But what are the odds of me meeting the Eucharistic minister in the hallway at that time and at that location? Everything just worked out perfectly. God comes to us and speaks to us through ordinary events and persons. There is a Chinese proverb that says "Listen and you will hear the footsteps of ants." Just make sure the volume on your hearing aid is raised to maximum. This proverb only tells us that we can hear and listen to God in the ordinary events of life. Let us pay special attention in the coming days to see God's presence in the ordinary events of our lives and the people we meet.