

Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sr Rachel Riordan OSM

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-14, Psalm 23(24):1-6, Romans 1:1-7, Mt1:23, Matthew 1:18-24

Each year, when the time approaches for the fourth candle on the Advent wreath to be lit I experience feelings of regret, asking myself if I have been so busy that the bright promise of Advent has passed me by. I know, though, that even in these last days when we must be busy about many things there will be those hallowed moments which invite us to stop, think and reflect on the point that we have reached on our personal pilgrimage to Bethlehem. Hesitations of the heart sometimes hold us back, but we are confident of God's compassion and forgiveness enabling us to 'reach out' and grasp those 'second chance' opportunities that permit us to meet Christ with relatively uncluttered hearts.

In the first reading from Isaiah, we learn that King Ahaz is anxious that his smaller Judean army is about to be vanquished by the powerful Assyrians. Although afraid, he proudly asserts that he will not ask the Lord for a sign. God, in his tender mercy, wants to reassure Ahaz of his love and fidelity. The lips of the prophet Isaiah proclaim that the Lord will give a sign, it is this 'the maiden is with child...a son...whom she will call Immanuel' (Isaiah 7:14).

The reading from Matthew's Gospel reinforces the message: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son and they will call him Emmanuel' (Matthew 1:23). During the time of waiting, Mary must have experienced uncertainty and insecurity but during that period she is a woman clothed in silence, her *Fiat* made real each day.

Waiting is a condition familiar to all but is a situation known well to our refugee friends. In Advent, we wait in certain hope because we know that the promise of the Redeemer has been fulfilled and because we are certain of food, shelter, friendship and family.

For our Refugee friends as they seek sanctuary in our Islands, waiting is hugely significant. They wait to hear from their Solicitors, from the Home Office, for the Night Shelters to open but above all else they wait with eager longing for news of those they have left behind. Their courage in the midst of adversity is a profound example to us all. Whatever our situation we are all on a journey. At JRS in the presence of fellow travellers, friendships develop, drawing us ever closer and increasing our understanding of the sacred nature of the word Communion. In our daily lives as we venture into the unknown, we are never really alone, for on those journeys God is always present often in 'unspectacular and unexpected' ways.