



Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

24 December 2017

St. David's Cathedral, Cardiff

Archbishop George Stack

You could be forgiven for feeling a slight degree of schizophrenia not only on the four Sundays of Advent, but particularly on this Fourth Sunday which is both the Fourth Sunday of Advent in the Church and Christmas Eve outside. For the last two months, the shops have been in full swing celebrating Christmas, not least with fabulous decorations, tempting ideas for gifts and wonderful food. Yet in the Church, we have been wearing purple and in our readings and prayers and music have been talking about waiting, and longing, hoping and forgiving. The schizophrenia reaches its climax today. This morning is the fourth Sunday of Advent – hence the four candles on the Advent wreath. This evening at 6pm it turns into Christmas Eve with the vigil Mass of Christmas. And the famous question in many phone calls to priest's houses "Do I have to go to Mass twice today?"

The Old Testament hope and longing of the Jewish people that God would send a Messiah comes to a climax in our readings today. God acts in unexpected ways through unexpected people. He tells the great king David "Are you the one to build a house for me? When your days are ended and you are laid to rest with your people, I will preserve the offspring of your body and make his sovereignty secure" (2 Sam 7:5-13). This is the House of David from which Jesus is descended.

That is why today we listen to the story of the Annunciation when the angel Gabriel announced that Mary would be the Mother of God. What extraordinary words. 'The Mother of God'. Whatever art gallery you go into you will always find great works of art depicting the Annunciation. But you only have to read the gospel and look at the pictures carefully to see hidden messages too. I always think of the word "wondered" about these things. I wonder if her "wonder" described the terror and amazement and confusion she felt? Would anyone believe her that the child she was bearing was not that of another man? Could Joseph possibly believe that what she said was true? "An angel visited me and asked me to be the Mother of God's Son". She escapes to Elizabeth her cousin for three months. To hide away? But eventually she has to go back to her own community which might reject her as an

immoral woman. I wonder if this was why there was no room for them at the inn?

I wonder if, when Mary stood at the foot of the cross watching her son die, she asked herself where was God in the midst of all this suffering and pain? Did she wonder if the message of the angel was all wrong and she had misunderstood what she was being asked, and she should have brought up her son in a different way? Did she remember the words of Simeon at the Presentation in the Temple that *“a sword shall pierce your own soul too”* (Lk 2:35)?

Each of our lives are full of questions, not least wondering why does this happen, how should I deal with that, and where do I find God in the midst of conflicting and confusing and sometimes painful situations.

Mary, standing by the wood of the cross, shows us that it is only when you believe in the Son of God hanging on that wood for our salvation can you kneel in front of the wood of the crib and see in the Christ child the Saviour of the world.

O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.