

The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

Fr Peter's Homily for The Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year B) 24th December 2023

'I am the handmaid of the Lord' says Mary. These words close our preparations for Christmas, our Advent work. As always, we close our Advent with Mary and watch with her for the birth of her Son. This is such a privilege for us, to wait with Mary, to be witnesses to the birth not just of a child, not even just of a Saviour, but of a new world, a new way of living, a new set of priorities. Like all mothers whose time is close, she must be wondering 'What will he be? What will his life be like? What will he be to me?'

'What will he be to me?' This last minute meditation of the Mother of the Saviour is the perfect way for us to pass a little time on this Fourth Sunday of Advent that is also Christmas Eve. What will he be to me, this child? Will he be an interesting diversion, or more than that? Will he be a challenge? Will he be a comforter in difficult times? Will he be my meaning, my hope? Will he be my Alpha and my Omega, my first and my last, my everything in between?

Lets find a few moments today, even if its just before we leave the Church after Mass, to stop beside Mary and wonder with her: What will he be, to me?

As you do that you might hold onto the remarkable image that the Carmelite poet Jessica Powers wrote into her poem 'Advent'. She has taken the idea of watching with Mary to its extreme as she rests with her in Advent darkness.

Advent

Jessica Powers

I live my Advent in the womb of Mary.
And on one night when a great star swings free
from its high mooring and walks down the sky
to be the dot above the Christus i,
I shall be born of her by blessed grace.
I wait in Mary-darkness, faith's walled place,
with hope's expectance of nativity.

I knew for long she carried me and fed me,
guarded and loved me, though I could not see.
But only now, with inward jubilee,
I come upon earth's most amazing knowledge:
someone is hidden in this dark with me.