

4th Sunday of Advent
Dec. 21 & 22, 2013

All Saints Church
Fr. Andy Szebenyi

My dear Brothers and Sisters.

In the first reading we heard Isaiah's prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah prophesied during the reign of Uzzia, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. This means the 7th century BC. Add two more centuries, and it is today. All together, nine thousand years, since Isaiah's prophecy.

My Sisters and Brothers, we celebrate Christmas in just a few days. It is our annual celebration that the prophecy has indeed been fulfilled. I would like to climb with you the mountain of history, and look at Christmas as it appears to us on the landscape below. What we see is the unfolding of our redemption in time. We see Christmas in history.

Unfolding means: changes of growth, from seed to flower and to new life in the fruit of the flower. In other words, what we see is the promise, then the fulfillment of the promise, and then living the time of fulfillment. In all this we also see the passage from the old covenant to the new, and then the life giving graces of the new covenant. We live in the present, the time to harvest all the benefits of a loving, caring, and merciful God who promised all this and made sure that it will happen, and is happening.

The promise is about the coming of our Redeemer, and this is the sign of his arrival, the fulfillment of the promise: The Virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel, God is with us. My dear Sisters and Brothers, we live in God's presence today, much more than ever. We live at the time of the harvest as we gather the fruits of our redemption. This is the meaning of Christmas today. This is the true joy of Christmas. This is what we see in the unfolding history of God's love and mercy.

The spirit of the world tries to make us forget this true meaning of Christmas. Tries to bury it under lights and noise and pressures of consumerism. In response, we should try to heal all that by reminding ourselves what Christmas is really about. It is about Emmanuel, God is with us. It is about the fulfillment of the promise in the unfolding history of our redemption. It is about eternal life, the true present of Christmas. I recommend to put in our homes next to the Christmas tree may be just the word, Emmanuel, God is with us, written on a card, or a small picture of the nativity scene showing Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus in a manger, or a group of small statues representing the first Christmas in Bethlehem. All these as a reminder that the promise has been fulfilled, and today we harvest its life giving grace through God's infinite love and mercy.

My Brothers and Sisters, Christmas is a time of joy and gratitude: a time of sharing.

Do not forget those in need. Do not forget the poor.

Amen