

**Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent – Year C**  
**December 23, 2018**

Little Terri has a very busy father. He is an executive who makes a lot of money and takes good care of his family; however, the demands of his job on his time result in very little time with his family. As part of Terri's bedtime ritual, her father reads her a story before she falls off to sleep; sometimes though, it takes quite a while for little Terri to fall asleep. So Terri's father, being the ingenious businessman that he is, came up with what he thought was the perfect solution: He bought a digital recording of a complete library of bedtime stories and, when Terri wanted to hear a bedtime story, he would play it back for her with the push of a button! He could then go into his home office and get some work done. Well, Terri accepted that for a few days then revolted. She would have no more of those recorded bedtime stories! When her father asked "Why? The recording reads the stories as well as I do!" Little Terri replied "Yes, but I can't sit on his lap!"

Among the things associated with Christmas is the act of giving. Christmas is the feast of giving. Christmas is when most people receive a present, even if it only be a Christmas card. People spend a lot of time and money shopping for the perfect Christmas gifts. We love to surprise family and friends with our gifts and to be surprised by theirs. God, the Father, also views Christmas as a feast of giving, for at Christmas we celebrate the mystery

of the incarnation when "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

(John 3:16) Christmas is giving: God gives and the people of God give!

But what to give? That is the question on the minds of most people this Advent season, with Christmas fast approaching. What you give family and friends says much about your relationship with the recipients; after all, that which is worth doing is worth doing well! How can we improve the quality of our giving? I believe that today's Gospel provides us with insight into that question.

On the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and in the daily Gospel reading earlier this week, we heard the story of the **Annunciation**: Mary was visited by God's messenger, the angel Gabriel, who made known to Mary God's plan to use her as the vessel, the Ark of the New Covenant, in which the Messiah, the Son of the Most High, will come into the world. With Mary's "YES" response--"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word"--Luke's Gospel immediately forwards to the scene in today's Gospel, the occasion we know as the **Visitation**.

Notice that "Mary set out...in haste" to visit her aging cousin Elizabeth, who pregnancy was evidence that the angel Gabriel presented to Mary to prove that "nothing [is] impossible with God." Mary could have sent her greetings and congratulations via a messenger, but filled with the Holy Spirit,

and now bearing our Messiah, Mary immediately set out alone on a perilous journey through the Judean hill country to be with her cousin. She made that journey, not because it was convenient for her; on the contrary, it was an arduous, 90-mile, uphill trek over dangerous roads from Galilee to Judea. She went because Elizabeth needed a helping hand. Being six-months pregnant, Elizabeth would find it difficult to draw water from the well, tend to her garden and animals on her farm, or go shopping in the village market. Mary went, in haste, and helped Elizabeth throughout the remaining term of her pregnancy, about three months.

**Mary gave Elizabeth the gift of herself.** A gift that many long for but don't receive; at Christmas, or any time of year. Little Terri's father gave his little girl digital recordings of bedtime stories but he didn't give her himself, his presence, his time. Whereas, when Mary entered Elizabeth's house, both Elizabeth and the infant in her womb, John the Baptist, who leaped in the presence of his Lord, Jesus Christ, were filled with indescribable joy.

Following Mary's example in today's Gospel, we should, we must, even more than material gifts, give of ourselves, our presence, our time. We **MUST** find time to visit with and be present for all the people in our lives: Family, friends, the sick, the homebound. This is the greatest gift of all because its value cannot be calculated in terms of money.

So, just as God the Father gives us the greatest possible gift, his only-begotten son, Jesus Christ, on Christmas, let us not forget that we ourselves, made in the image and likeness of God, by our mere presence can truly be a gift to each other.

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Finally, today we have been blessed to participate in the Rite of Acceptance of Inquirers Daniel and Kaden who, like the leaping infant in the womb, have recognized the presence of Jesus Christ in their lives and have been accepted into the Order of Catechumens. We now have the opportunity over the coming months, by our presence and prayerful support, to help them continue their journey toward full communion with us at the Easter Vigil.