

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, December 24, 2017

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

THE MAIN CHARACTER

Who is the main character in the story? What character is central to the plot? Teachers often ask these questions when their students complete a reading assignment.

Teachers want to know if their students appreciated what they read and understood the actions, interactions, and motivations of the characters. Obviously, understanding the main character is critical to appreciating a story.

Main characters stand out in the stories we read. For example, *A Christmas Carol*, the beloved story by Charles Dickens, brings to mind Ebenezer Scrooge. *Moby Dick*, written by Herman Melville, reminds us of the obsessed Captain Ahab.

This Sunday, the fourth and final Sunday of Advent, we hear a Gospel reading (Luke 1:26-38) that prepares us for the birth of the Messiah. Luke relates how the angel Gabriel came to Mary, the young maiden of Nazareth, and announced she had been chosen to give birth to “the Son of the Most High.”

If we were asked who is the main character in that Gospel reading, we might answer “Mary.” She is the one who is visited by an angel. She is the one asked to give birth to the Messiah. She is the one whose response is critical if the story is to move forward.

However, we could have a different answer. We might say that the angel Gabriel is the main character. If he did not make his announcement to Mary, she would have remained just another woman in Nazareth, and like the rest would have been forgotten by history. Gabriel makes the difference, he sets things in motion.

However, if we carefully examine the account in Luke, we realize that neither Mary nor Gabriel is the main character. The main character is God. God is the one who initiates the action and moves the story forward.

It is God who directs the angel to go to Mary. As Luke tells us, “the angel Gabriel was sent from God ... to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph and the virgin's name was Mary.” For she was the one that God had favored and filled with his grace. A fact recognized by the angel as he greeted her, “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.” Mary then conceives because God sends the power of his Spirit upon her. Everything happens by the power and action of God.

God is the main character in Sunday’s Gospel and throughout the Gospels of the coming Christmas Season. In fact, God is the main character throughout the scriptures. The scriptures tell us the story of God reaching out to his people.

That story continues to happen as God reaches out to us. We are people of faith, not because of what we have done, but because God has touched our lives in some way and brought us to faith.

God is the main character in every story of salvation, including ours!

© 2017 Rev. Thomas B. Iwanowski

Best Wishes for a Joyous Christmas, Filled with God's Presence and Peace!