**4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT [23rd December, 2012]**

READINGS: Micah 5:1-4/ Ps. 80/ Heb. 10:5-10/ Luke 1:39-45

THEME: **BETHLEHEM**

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

None of us determined where he/she was born, but some parents may plan and determine the exact places of birth of their children. Some young women of developing countries even travel abroad to give birth, so that their children could become citizens of developed countries. While the fortunes of some persons may be enhanced by their places of births (e.g. an African born in the USA), Jesus has rather placed the *insignificant* town of Bethlehem (*cf*. Matt. 2:6) in the ‘hall of fame’ of human history. As Christmas approaches, therefore, it will be good to reflect on the significance of the birth-place of our Saviour.

Bethlehem was quite a little town (*cf*. Micah 5:1-2, the first reading), situated about 9.5km to the south of Jerusalem. In the olden days it had been called Ephrata (*cf*. first reading). It was in Bethlehem, that Ruth and Boaz, the great-grandparents of King David married (Ruth 1:22) – hence, it became the hometown of the king. According to St. Luke when the Roman Emperor decreed that everyone should go to his/ her hometown for the census, Joseph, being a descendant of David, went to Judea to David’s town of Bethlehem to be registered with Mary who was with child (Luke 2:1-5).

The name Bethlehem, according to William Barclay, means ‘House of Bread’. He explains that this was because Bethlehem stood in a fertile countryside in contrast to the general rough land of Judah.

**SOME LESSONS**

From the above I would like us to take the following brief lessons:

* When Ruth had lost her husband she travelled to Bethlehem and it was there that she found Boaz to marry her. Her desire was fulfilled there. When God promised to send mankind a Saviour, His promise was fulfilled in Bethlehem. Thus, figuratively Bethlehem is a ‘place’ where God’s promises are fulfilled. God meets us in our own little ‘Bethlehems’ when His promises are fulfilled in our lives, or our dreams are realized.
* Bethlehem was a little, humble town, but God did the greatest miracle there. When we humble ourselves, He will lift us up.
* Related to the preceding point, we could say that God sees more potentials in us than we can see and believe about ourselves. Let us, therefore, not despair easily; He has not finished with us; He will never give up on us, so we should never give up.
* When we bear fruit in our Christian lives, we could see ourselves as being good branches on Jesus, the True Vine (John 15:1-5) on the ***fertile*** land of Bethlehem.
* Furthermore, Bethlehem meaning ‘House of Bread’ should remind us that God provides us with our daily bread [He provides for the poor and needy through us].
* Finally, Jesus, the **Bread of Heaven**, was born in the ‘**House of Bread’** to be received as the **Bread of Life** for all mankind. Let us, therefore, receive him by faith and reverence, in Holy Communion, so that He may always live in us unto eternal life. Amen!