

**4th Sunday of Advent**  
**2 Samuel 7:1-5, 86,-12,14a, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38**

For years a small marble statue stood in the entrance hall of the French Embassy building in New York City. The statue's arms and face were badly damaged, but it had a quaint charm that made it a good conversation piece. So the embassy kept it in a prominent place in the entrance hall. One day the statue attracted the attention of art expert Dr. Brandt, a professor at New York University. As she studied it, her heart began to beat faster, because it matched the description of a long-lost statue by Michelangelo. Further study – and consultation with other art experts – confirmed her wildest dream.

It was a statue of Cupid, sculpted by Michelangelo in his early years. Amazingly, it had stood there, all these years, without being recognized.

I like that story, because it serves as a kind of parable of something John the Baptist said while baptizing people in the Jordan River. He told the people: "There is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me."

In other words, just as the statue of Cupid stood in the embassy for years without being recognized, so Jesus lived – and continues to live among us – without being recognized. And that brings us to the season of Advent which is drawing to a close.

We have heard many times that Advent is a preparation for the celebration of two comings of Jesus: his first coming in history 2,000 years ago and his last coming in majesty at the end of the world.

Saint Bernard observed, however, that, in its widest sense, Advent is really a preparation for not two but three comings of Jesus. He went on to explain. Jesus' first coming in history and his last coming in majesty are visible comings. Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds saw the first coming. And every person who ever lived will see the last coming. Saint Bernard went on to say that Jesus also comes in an invisible way in mystery, that is, in a way that is visible only through eyes of faith. This coming of Jesus in mystery is a kind of spiritual bridge spanning the gap between Jesus' first coming and his last. The invisible comings of Jesus in mystery takes place in three ways: word – listening to Scripture; worship – gathering as church; witness – living out Jesus' teaching. Let's take a closer look at each of these three ways: word, worship, and witness.

Concerning Jesus' coming when we listen to his word, Jesus said to his followers, "Whoever listens to you listens to me," Luke 10:1 Concerning his coming when we worship together, Jesus said: "Where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them?"

Finally, concerning his coming when we witness to his teaching, Jesus said: "Those who . . . obey my teaching my Father and I will come to them and live with them?" John 14:25

In summary, then, Jesus comes into our lives in mystery during three graced times – when we: listen to Scripture (word), gather as church (worship), live out his teaching (witness). That raises an important question. How do we prepare to meet Jesus in each of these graced moments? Take the first graced moment: Jesus' coming in Scripture. We should prepare for it by listening attentively with an open mind, lovingly with an open heart, and trustingly with an open soul.

That brings us to the second graced moment: Jesus' coming among us when we gather as church. We prepare for this moment, especially, by consciously uniting ourselves in love and faith as a worshiping community that offers itself in and with Jesus to the Father. For example, as we walk up to receive Communion, we make a conscious effort to realize who it is that we receive.

We are to receive the same Jesus who was born in Bethlehem.

We are to receive the same Jesus who healed the sick and forgave sinners. We are to receive the same Jesus who died on the cross for us.

We begin our preparation right after receiving the Body and Blood of Christ.

We commit ourselves to living out in daily life what we have just celebrated: our oneness through and in Christ with one another and with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Above all, we pledge to love and serve our brothers and sisters, especially those who have special needs.

In conclusion, then, in its widest sense, Advent celebrates Christ's coming among us in history, mystery, and majesty. And of these three comings, the most immediate is Christ's coming in mystery. It is also especially important. Why? Because it is a graced moment, we resolve to try to live out what Jesus taught us in his first coming. And in so doing, we prepare for Christ's final coming in majesty. Furthermore, unless we learn to recognize Jesus' presence among us in mystery – that is, in word, worship, and witness – we may not recognize him when he comes in majesty at the end of time,

Let us close with a prayer asking Mary to help us prepare for Jesus' three comings in our life, as she prepared for them in her life: Hail Holy Queen, mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To you we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to you we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Be merciful to us, loving advocate, Virgin Mary, and after our exile, show us your son, Jesus. Adapted