



# Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers  
From the clergy and members  
of Holy Trinity Church  
Forbes Park, Makati

Date: 24 December 2006  
Title: **"Housecleaning"**  
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## Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Micah 5:2-4  
Second Reading Hebrews 10:5-10  
Gospel Luke 1:39-49

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When the fourth Sunday of Advent falls on Christmas Eve every seven years, it presents a real challenge to the preacher. In fact, our morning services become almost a preparation for the rites we will be celebrating later in the day. All of the readings for this Sunday point to the event that we've all been waiting for: the first reading from Micah tells us "Where": that Bethlehem is to be the chosen place; the reading from Hebrews tells us "Why": that Christ has come into the world to fulfill all further need for sacrifice by his life and death, and the Gospel tells us "Who": with two women, Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, reveling in the mysterious ways of God who would choose both of them to "prepare the way for the Lord."

But perhaps we need not so much to hear more narratives from Luke right now, as to prepare the way for the Lord in our own lives. How do we prepare for Christmas? For most of us, sadly, this has nothing to do with spiritual matters. We are much more concerned about buying

gifts, preparing food for the Noche Buena or Christmas dinner, and making sure that the house is clean and ready. Little thought is given to our *internal* preparation- the really *personal* housecleaning that needs to precede a worthy celebration.

In former days, Christmas Eve was a day of solemn fast. Even today in some traditions, the early evening meal will be one of abstinence, a meatless and simple meal of fish and vegetables, denying oneself, at least for a couple more hours, the riches that are to follow when the midnight celebrations begin. Most of us don't keep the old traditions anymore- indeed, for many, the parties began months ago- and self-denial is what we promise ourselves for the New Year, not Christmas Eve!

For that reason, I would like us to use this morning's service to think hard about what we have done, or left undone, that compromises Christmas for us this year. In what ways are we totally unprepared to welcome Jesus into our homes and our hearts? There isn't time before the Christmas services today to save the environment, feed all the hungry and bring world peace, but we can take a moment to take a fearless personal inventory and to ask forgiveness both of God and of each other. This is the time to mend broken relationships, beginning here in church, and to ask God not only to forgive, but also to heal. That can at least begin here this morning, hours before we sing the first carols in our afternoon or evening worship. And yes, it can at least begin outside this church before Christmas really hits.

Today, we hear the Gospel of two women who tell each other in great simplicity of heart how God is present in their lives. As they celebrate with thanksgiving the wonders that God has done for them, we have the opportunity to do the same: to share with our friends, our families, with people we have just met, that God has done something good in our lives. But we can do so only if we admit that we need help- if we begin the healing process of letting God back into our lives and letting God be God again. Then we will understand what we're celebrating tonight: the birth of the One who calls us all home. May yours be a happy and a holy Christmas.