

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jan 15th 2014

The Christmas decorations have been taken down and, in most cases, the nativity sets we have in our homes have been lovingly, carefully, wrapped and put away for safekeeping until Advent 2014.

The glow of Christmas and its celebration of God entering our world in an unprecedented way, as a tiny baby, have launched us into the new year. Here at Creighton, classes are resuming and students are returning to campus. If we're not careful, we can just pick up where we left off, OR, we can let Christ's birth continue to be a daily, transformative reality in our lives.

The unifying message I see in today's readings is that we need to listen and to respond to God's promptings in our lives. Sometimes they are direct messages from God and sometimes they come through other people. But just listening isn't enough, although it is an important first step.

When our sons were little, I remember my husband and I often having to ask the question, "Did you hear what I said?" Their usual reply was, "I heard you," to which my husband always answered, "I need you to listen AND respond." It became almost a mantra around our house.

Samuel, in the first reading, was listening and he was trying to respond, but he wasn't listening closely enough to realize it was the Lord speaking to him. He needed Eli to counsel him. That's OK...we all need the wisdom of elders and those more spiritually in touch than ourselves. Once he learned that God was truly speaking to him, he responded appropriately and developed a deep relationship with the Lord.

The responsorial psalm echoes Samuel's sentiments: "Here am I, Lord, I come to do your will." There is special mention of having "ears open" and then acting.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus listens to his friends' entreaty to help Simon's mother-in-law, even if they may have not made a direct request. Just telling Jesus about her plight was enough for him to immediately respond, reaching out and healing her instantly.

The next day, after a full evening of dealing with crowds gathered at the door and curing as many as

possible, he rose early and “went off to a deserted place” to pray. I can just imagine the prayers he offered, probably discussing with his Father the fatigue he may have felt, concerns for others, his hopes for the future, and quietly listening as he absorbed strength from the Holy Spirit.

When his friends found him, he had a response ready for them. He wanted to go to nearby villages and preach, saying, “For this purpose have I come.” Through listening to God’s call through prayer, he was able to focus in on what he was to do. He shows us the way to discover what we are to do: listen to God’s whispers in our hearts and then act on them. We may not always have the extreme clarity to say, “For this purpose have I come,” but sometimes we will, and other times we will know at least what direction we should go and what direction we should avoid. Great advice as we begin a new year!

Cindy Murphy McMahan