**READINGS:** Micah 5:1-4/ Ps. 80/ Heb. 10:5-10/ Luke 1:39-45  
**THEME:** BETHLEHEM  
4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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

None of us determined his/her place of birth, though some parents may plan and determine the exact places of birth of their children. For instance, some young women of developing countries travel abroad to give birth, so that their children could become citizens of those developed countries.

Now, 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 Bethlehem, the birth-place of our Saviour.

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.

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.  Furthermore, 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 the Blessed Virgin Mary who was with child (Luke 2:1-5).

**SOME LESSONS:** From the above I would like us to reflect on the following 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. Similarly, 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 it became the birth-place of the greatest person ever. Thus, when we humble ourselves, God will lift us up.
* Related to the preceding point, we could say that God sees more potentials in us than we can see in 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 on ourselves.
* Finally, Jesus, the **Bread of Heaven**, was born in Bethlehem (the **House of Bread**) to be received as the **Bread of Life** for all mankind. Let us, therefore, receive him by faith and reverence, esp. in Holy Communion, so that He may always live in us unto eternal life.  Amen!