

Scripture Study

Fourth Sunday of Advent – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Isaiah 7:10-14

(Ps 24:1-6)

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-24

Overview of the Gospel:

- Three weeks ago, we heard the Annunciation as the gospel reading for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception; we now hear about Joseph and his reaction to the news.
- Knowing he was not the father of the child being carried by Mary (that, in fact, she had conceived of the Holy Spirit; see verse 18), but not wanting to subject her to the harsh Jewish penalties for adultery (Deuteronomy 24:1-4, 22:20-23), Joseph planned to pursue the milder option of divorcing her quietly.
- He is prevented from doing so by an angel who appears to him in a dream. The angel, addressing him as “son of David” reminds him of his lineage in the house of King David through whom the promised Messiah would come (2 Samuel 7:12).
- Thus the word of the prophet Isaiah (verses 22-23; Isaiah 7:14) was fulfilled: that Jesus would be born of the house of David, Mary is the Virgin who will give birth to him, and that his conception is miraculous, through the Spirit of God. Jesus is Emmanuel, a name which means “God is with us.” Jesus is the God who is always with us: in his first Advent (John 1:1, 14), until the Second Advent (Matthew 28:20), and forever in eternity (Revelation 21:3-4).

Questions:

- In the 1st reading, King Ahaz was insincere in not wanting a sign from God. But if God chose to give you a sign, would you accept it—even if meant changing your life because of it?
- In the 2nd reading in verses 2—4, where does St. Paul say the Gospel message originated? What two things does he affirm about Jesus? How do these all relate to the mystery of his coming into the world that we will celebrate next week at Christmas?
- How would you feel in Joseph’s place in verse 19? In verses 20-21? What would you say to your family and friends? To God?
- What reason does Matthew give as to why Jesus was born (verse 21; see Luke 1:67-79)?
- Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 and applies it to Jesus: How has the name “Emmanuel” been fulfilled in Jesus?
- What is most striking to you in this story of Jesus’ conception? How have you experienced Jesus as Emmanuel this Advent?
- What is the importance of the detail that Joseph “woke from sleep” as he was considering his relationship with Mary? What events in your life have entailed a similar “waking from sleep”? What happened as a result?
- What do you learn about trust and faith from Joseph?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 1846, 2666

Closing Prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!

The most beautiful act of faith is the one made in darkness, in sacrifice, and with extreme effort.

–St. Padre Pio

"He will save his people from their sins"

Scripture: *Matthew 1:18-24*

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife into his home.

Meditation: Do you believe that God will fulfill every promise he has made to us? The prophet Isaiah spoke words of hope in a hopeless situation for Israel. The Davidic dynasty was corrupt and unfit for a Messianic King. Apostates like King Ahaz (2 Kings 16) and weaklings like Zedekiah (Jeremiah 38) occupied the throne of David. When God offered King Ahaz a sign, the king refused. God, nonetheless, gave Israel a sign to assure his people that he would indeed raise up a righteous King who would rule forever over the house of David. We see the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and the unfolding of God's plan of redemption in the events leading



up to the Incarnation, the birth of the Messiah. The new era of salvation begins with the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. This child to be born is the fulfillment of all God's promises.

Mary had to face an enormous challenge to her faith and trust in God and to the faith of her family and Joseph, the man she chose to marry. She was asked to assume a burden of tremendous responsibility. It had never been heard of before that a child could be born without a natural father. Mary was asked to accept this miraculous exception to the laws of nature. That required faith and trust in God and in his promises. Second, Mary was not yet married. Pregnancy outside of wedlock was not tolerated in those days. Mary was only espoused to Joseph, and such an engagement had to last for a whole year. She was asked to assume a great risk. She could have been rejected by Joseph, by her family, by all her own people. Mary knew that Joseph and her family would not understand

without revelation from God. She nonetheless believed and trusted in God's promises.

Joseph, a just and God-fearing man, did not wish to embarrass or punish his espoused wife, Mary when he discovered that she was pregnant. To all appearances she had broken their solemn pledge to be faithful and chaste to one another. Joseph, no doubt took this troubling matter to God in prayer. He was not hasty to judge or to react with hurt and anger. God rewarded him not only with guidance and consolation, but with the divine assurance that he had indeed called Joseph to be the husband of Mary and to assume a mission that would require the utmost faith, confidence, and trust in Almighty God. Joseph believed in the divine message to take Mary as his wife and to accept the child in her womb as the promised Messiah. Like Mary, Joseph is a model of faith for us. He is a faithful witness and servant of God's unfolding plan of redemption. Are you ready to believe in the promises of God, even when faced with perplexing circumstances and what seems like insurmountable problems? God has not left us alone, but has brought us his only begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us celebrate Christmas, the feast of the Incarnation, with joyful hearts and let us renew our faith and hope in God and in his redeeming work.

"Lord Jesus, you came to save us from sin and the power of death. May I always rejoice in your salvation and trust in your plan for my life".

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