



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



Fourth Sunday of Advent, Cycle A

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"...the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us'" Matt 1:24

This passage tells the most profoundly beautiful story in the history of humankind. In it, an ordinary man living his uneventful day-to-day life is confronted with life-altering conflict that demands a course of action. Because that man, Joseph, is a holy man of God he resolves in a striking way to alter the course of his life, and in so doing, the course of human history. He is torn between respecting the person, Mary, while resolving to not undercut the Law of Moses. His struggle, the tension between law and love, will be passed on to many throughout Jesus' life, for this tension and struggle is the hallmark of Jesus' ministry. The law is the law of God, where we are told in no uncertain terms in 1 John 6, *"God is Love."* Love always considers first the dignity of the person, which then flows through and interprets every nuance of the law through the lens of love.

In singer/songwriter Brandon Heath's profound song, "Love Never Fails" the words echo what Joseph the man must have resolved to be:

*Love is the river that flows through
Love is the arms that are holding you
And love is the place you will fly to...
Love never fails you.*

Joseph is the first person (besides Mary) to have to deal with the tension of the Incarnation (God taking flesh in Jesus). It is our conflict, too: When Christ enters our lives, situations arise that make difficult choices necessary. But love must always prevail.

The angel's big, full voice is one of great comfort and encouragement. The Lord's messenger brings a pathway to resolution, a discerned consolation and peace and an answer to any problem.

That voice of comfort rises to genuine exaltation when the words of Isaiah (from the first reading) are quoted. Reflect on how Matthew is showing that the prophecy is fulfilled in the conception of Jesus. The gospel writer's main concern here is to illuminate our profound understanding that Jesus is of divine, not human, origin.

But as in any illuminated message, there is more: we, too, are called to hear and obey. To hear, we must move our heart and mind to quietude where the unbridled restlessness within us is quelled in a peaceful moment of prayer. We can then follow holy obedience as we discern. This is our moment of transcendence. Our spiritual senses awaken, as Joseph's did when he awakened from the dream. It is a moment of discernment to move from the perception of mortal judgment to the mystical discernment of spirits.

We can take comfort in our relationship with the Virgin Mary as did Joseph, in the words of the Memorare: *"Remember O most gracious Virgin Mary that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection was left unaided."*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

The birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.
When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph,
but before they lived together,
she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man
and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace,
planned to dismiss her quietly.
But just when he had resolved to do this,
an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

*“Joseph, son of David,
do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,
for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.
She will bear a son,
and you are to name him Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.”*

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

*“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,
which means, ‘God is with us.’”*

When Joseph awoke from sleep,
he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him;
he took her as his wife.

The Gospel of the Lord

