

Cycle A – Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 18, 2022

“The virgin shall conceive and bear a son ...”

3 readings

OPENING PRAYER (Psalm 24)

Leader: The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it,
the world and those who live in it;

All: For the Lord has founded it upon the seas,
and established it on the river.

Leader: Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord?
And who shall stand in God’s holy place?

All: Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false.
Amen



First Reading – Isaiah 7:10-14

Every Advent Sunday this year has opened with Isaiah’s words, culminating today in the delightful proclamation to King Ahaz, which Matthew picks up in today’s Gospel passage. It is no accident that this great promise is held up to us in a time when our winter days are filled with more darkness than light. Remember that God’s promise through Isaiah’s words comes exactly at times of fragmentation and decline: the country is threatened by two kingdoms and King Ahaz is ambivalent. Key in the prophecy is the promise of a sign, the birth of a child from the line of David. The meaning of the child’s name, Emmanuel, God-with-us, is reassurance that God does not abandon his people, not in the here and now, nor in the life to come.

1. Ahaz does not know what to do: ask for a sign or refrain from putting the Lord to the test. When have we felt ambivalent and unsure about what to do?
2. What kind of signs has God given you at times in your life when the darkness seems to outweigh the light?

Second Reading – Romans 1:1-7

Paul’s formal introduction to this letter sounds much like a creed, summarizing all the essentials about Jesus and our faith in him. This proclamation of faith is fully integrated into how Paul’s regards his own vocation and mission. Paul considers himself set apart to proclaim salvation through Jesus Christ, who was the fulfillment of the prophets, and to bring this Good News to Jews and Gentiles alike.

1. How does your faith influence and form your vocation and your mission? What impact does believing in Jesus Christ have on your day-to-day life?
2. In what ways do you feel “set apart” and for what?

Gospel – Matthew 1:18-24

Whereas Luke's infancy narrative features Mary, Matthew's account of the birth of Christ features Joseph. Matthew connects Joseph to the Joseph in Genesis (The youngest son of Jacob, chapters 38-50) especially through the occurrence of a dream in which the angel appears. Joseph is also "from the line of David." Even though Joseph does not speak, he is a righteous man, embodying all that is holy in the tradition of Israel. Joseph's openness to God's spirit prepared him to listen to a dream, receive a message from God, and act on it. Joseph is challenged to trust without knowing the outcome of events – that is the essence of faith.

1. What themes or lessons do you draw from this Gospel account?
2. Recall a time when you were challenged to trust without knowing the outcome.
3. How can we be living signs of "God-with-us" in our parish community and in our world?

LIVING THE WORD

What is God's challenge for me/us this coming week?

PRAYING THE WORD

Intercession: For women and men in our parish who yearn for signs of God in their lives, who suffer from broken promises and betrayals, and for all those who need a visible expression of "God-with-us" through the care of the faith community.
We pray to the Lord.

Invite other intentions, end with "Our Father ..."

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: For the prophets and the apostles who announced your coming among us,

All: Blessed be you, O Lord.

Leader: For the Virgin Mary who, by faith, welcomed you into her heart,

All: Blessed be you, O Lord.

Leader: For Joseph, the husband of Mary, who, by his obedience, received you into his family,

All: Blessed be you, O Lord.

Leader: Because you stay with us, Emmanuel, until the end of time,

All: Blessed be you, O Lord.

Leader: Let us share with one another a sign of peace, a peace the world cannot give.