

## Fourth Sunday of Advent A - Let's pray to St. Joseph to help us do what he did December 22, 2019.

The readings for this Sunday are an immediate preparation for Christmas. Instead of hearing about the Second Coming of the Lord in the First Sunday of Advent and about the instructions and the mission of John the Baptist in the Second and Third Sundays of Advent, we are brought to the events that took place within nine months of Jesus' birth. This Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 1:18-24, and yes skipping the long list of the genealogy of Jesus, the forty-two generations that stretch from Abraham to Christ, Matthew 1:1-17) gives us the opportunity to focus on one of the main figures in the stories of the Birth of Our Lord, the **Infancy Narratives**, St. Joseph. *Infancy narratives are the Christmas stories as found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.* The Prologue of the *Gospel of John* gives a theological presentation of the Eternal Word of God become flesh, and John starts his narrative with the events that took place when the Lord had already become a man, the preaching of John the Baptist and the baptism of the Lord. The Infancy Narratives in the *Gospel of Luke (1:26-38)* present Joseph as the foster father of the Lord, but the main focus outside of Jesus is placed on Mary. It's the *Gospel of Matthew*, this Sunday's gospel that focuses on Joseph. This makes a great deal of sense. Matthew's main audience were Jewish Christians. Joseph was of the line of David. The Jewish people were very much aware that God had promised David that his Kingdom would never end.

But the Gospel also makes it clear that Joseph was not the birth father of the Lord. Mary was a Virgin. The child was conceived through the Holy Spirit. Mary, an unmarried woman, was expecting! Everybody knows that pregnancy doesn't occur without sex. According to Jewish law, premarital sex is punishable by stoning to death. So, Mary's pregnancy out of wedlock exposes her to the penalty of death. And in Mary's society, no one wants to marry a sinful woman and supports an illegitimate child. It is clear, then, that Mary's pregnancy exposes her not only to legal penalties but also to suffering and shame. And poor Joseph, what should he do? Dump Mary? Marry then divorce? Or get married and treat the baby as his own? In his dream, Joseph was told, "**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."**" Joseph was given the opportunity to do as the Lord commanded him; he took Mary as his wife. Joseph opened himself whole-heartedly to God in quiet faith. No spoken word of his has been recorded but his life shows us a person utterly obedient to the word of God. A humble man caring for his wife and peacefully watching the growth of the child Jesus in wisdom and maturity. So, a potential shameful humiliation to Mary turns into a joyful celebration for the Joseph family. As such, Jesus becomes part of the line of David through Joseph. **One unplanned pregnancy brings joy to the world!**

In just two days, we will sing sweet carols about the Babe of Bethlehem. Although we know that this is the Second Person of the Trinity, we also know that he chose to become totally one of us, to be conceived and carried in a womb, to be an infant, toddler, child, teenager and young adult before revealing himself to the world at his Baptism by John the Baptist. And so we focus on his infancy. We tell him in song to "**sleep in heavenly peace.**" We sing of the unexpected "**Joy to the world**". We have a responsibility as Christians to celebrate the pregnancy of our sisters in Christ in the parish, the diocese, the whole world and the arrival of babies. They are all our babies. They are part of our family. They are made in the image and likeness of God. They will radiate His presence in a way the world has never experienced before. They will be capable of being saviours, saviours to their parents, saving them from selfishness, saviours to those whom they will love or be loved in their lives. It is clear from the scripture that Joseph provided for more than Jesus's external needs. He loved the child. He took him into his family. He named him. And, I am sure he held him and rocked him to sleep when Mary was exhausted. He celebrated this unexpected child and in doing so celebrated the presence of God's love on in the service of Christ. His

example gives us courage to face problems in a similar spirit and to keep on believing when all seems hopeless. Along with Mary he is singled out as the one who can best prepare us for Christmas.

**Let's pray to St. Joseph to help us do what he did: listen to God's earth. Joseph gave everything message, act on that message, trusting despite doubts, questions and fears; protect and guard that "tiny gift of God" that's going to save the world. Let's prepare to celebrate: *"Joy to the world! The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare Him room. And heaven and nature sing, And heaven and nature sing, And heaven, and heaven and nature sing."***