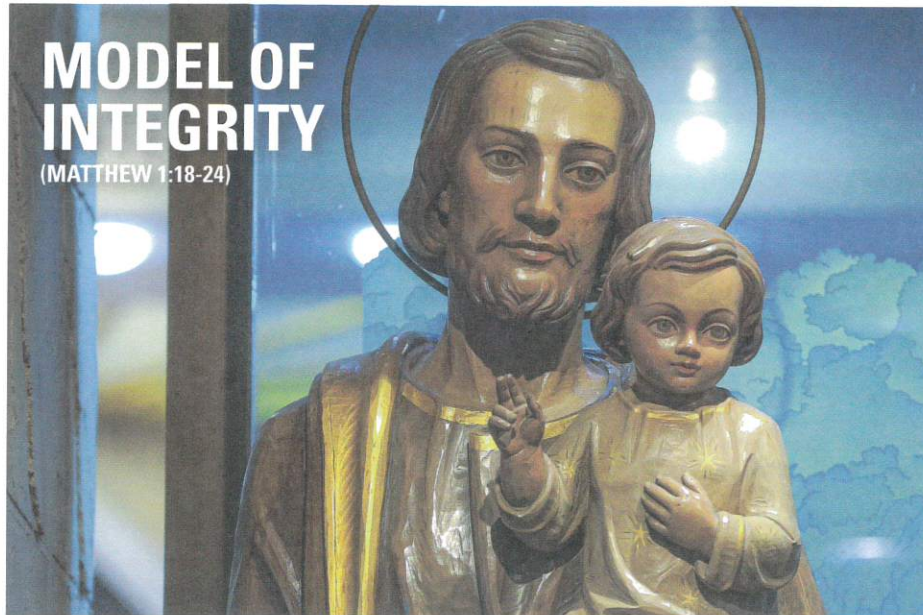


# Sunday Message

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE WORD

Year A • 18 December 2022 • Psalter Week 4



The central figure in today's Gospel is Joseph, the often forgotten hero of the Christmas story.

Christian art has never been kind to St Joseph. It usually depicts him as an elderly man. What of the real Joseph? We know little about him, except that he was a native of Bethlehem, and by trade he was a carpenter, a word that can include many aspects of the building trade. The Joseph of this story was probably a reasonably young man. Marriage took place early in Judaism. The usual age for men to marry was in their late teens. As the story opens, this young man's future happiness is clouded by an event he finds hard to understand.

Matthew uses only one word to describe Joseph: "he was a man of honour." That is the highest praise the Old Testament can lavish on any person. We hear not a word from Joseph in today's Gospel or throughout the entire two chapters of Matthew's account of Jesus' birth. For Matthew, what is more important is that Joseph is an obedient man. He responds without question to the challenges set before him. He embarks on marriage with a young woman who has conceived her child by the Holy Spirit. He will emigrate to a foreign land to protect the child and his mother. He will return, again without question, and settle in Nazareth, far from his kin, to give the child a secure future. Above all, he will provide the child with a name and a father's love.

Joseph is a model of integrity and uprightness, a model of what it means to seek to do God's will. ■

## REFLECT

Advent is running out of time. In just a few days, Christmas will be on us. Lest we forget, the readings today are tripping over each other to remind us what Christmas is all about. The first reading reminds us of Isaiah's prophecy made many centuries earlier: "The maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'."

In the second reading, St Paul reminds us of Christ's origin: In the body, he was a human descendant of King David, and

in the order of the Spirit, he was Son of God. The Gospel tells us how Jesus was miraculously conceived in the womb of Mary and given the name of Jesus, meaning "Saviour". The prophecy had been fulfilled.

So now the scene is set. Are you ready? Can you share in Mary's astonishment when Gabriel told her she was to become the mother of the Messiah? Can you realise with Joseph that something extraordinary is about to happen? Can you feel the excitement of knowing that the

## PRAY

Joseph and Mary were people of extraordinary faith. Despite the confusion and pain they must have experienced after discovering that Mary was pregnant, they trusted in God and God's plan for them. Pray that you, too, may have the radical faith of Joseph and Mary.

## LEARN

Like Joseph, we Christians are called to listen attentively to what God asks of us.

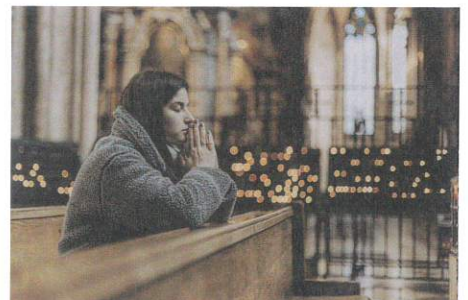
Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promise to humanity.

## SAY

Lord, I look forward to your coming. Help me to be always aware of your presence.

## DO

We can be so busy in the run-up to Christmas that we lose sight of what it is all about. Take some time this week to reflect on what we are celebrating in the feast of Christmas.



God of the universe has put on our human nature? Are you thrilled by the knowledge that he who humbled himself to share in our humanity has offered us a share in his divinity?

In the days left, step aside for a while from the hustle and bustle of Christmas presents and Christmas dinners and let yourself be caught up in the intense joy of that night in Bethlehem. With Mary, can you find time to treasure all these wonderful events in your heart? ■

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Drop down dew from above, you heavens,  
and let the clouds rain down the Just One;  
let the earth be opened and bring forth a  
Saviour.

**COLLECT**

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord,  
your grace into our hearts,  
that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ  
your Son  
was made known by the message of an  
Angel,  
may by his Passion and Cross  
be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.  
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING**

Isaiah 7:10-14

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

The Lord spoke to Ahaz and said, "Ask the  
Lord your God for a sign from yourself  
coming either from the depths of Sheol  
or from the heights above." "No," Ahaz  
answered "I will not put the Lord to the test."

Then Isaiah said:

"Listen now, House of David:  
are you not satisfied with trying the  
patience of men  
without trying the patience of God, too?  
The Lord himself, therefore,  
will give you a sign.  
It is this: the maiden is with child  
and will soon give birth to a son  
whom she will call Emmanuel,  
a name which means 'God-is-with-us'."

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 23

Response:

**Let the Lord enter!  
He is the king of glory.**

1. The Lord's is the earth and its fullness,  
the world and all its peoples.  
It is he who set it on the seas;  
on the waters he made it firm. (R.)
2. Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord?  
Who shall stand in his holy place?  
The man with clean hands and pure heart,  
who desires not worthless things. (R.)
3. He shall receive blessings from the Lord  
and reward from the God who saves him.  
Such are the men who seek him,  
seek the face of the God of Jacob. (R.)

**SECOND READING**

Romans 1:1-7

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the  
Romans.

From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus who has  
been called to be an apostle, and specially  
chosen to preach the Good News that God  
promised long ago through his prophets in  
the scriptures.

This news is about the Son of God, who,  
according to the human nature he took, was  
a descendant of David: it is about Jesus  
Christ our Lord who, in the order of the  
spirit, the spirit of holiness that was in him,  
was proclaimed Son of God in all his power

through his resurrection from the dead.  
Through him we received grace and our  
apostolic mission to preach the obedience  
of faith to all pagan nations in honour of his  
name. You are one of these nations, and by  
his call belong to Jesus Christ. To you all,  
then, who are God's beloved in Rome, called  
to be saints, may God our Father and the  
Lord Jesus Christ send grace and peace.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a  
son  
and they will call him Emmanuel,  
a name which means "God-is-with-us".  
Alleluia!

**GOSPEL**

Matthew 1:18-24

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Matthew.

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born.  
His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph;  
but before they came to live together she  
was found to be with child through the Holy  
Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of  
honour and wanting to spare her publicity,  
decided to divorce her informally. He had  
made up his mind to do this when the angel  
of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, and  
said "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid  
to take Mary home as your wife, because  
she has conceived what is in her by the Holy  
Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you  
must name him Jesus, because he is the one  
who is to save his people from their sins."  
Now all this took place to fulfil the words  
spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a  
son  
and they will name him Emmanuel,  
a name which means "God-is-with-us". When  
Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the  
Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his  
home.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

**I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.**

**I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with  
the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
(all bow during the next three lines)  
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the  
Virgin Mary,  
and became man.**

**For our sake he was crucified under  
Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven**

**and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored  
and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.**

**I believe in one, holy, catholic and  
apostolic Church.**

**I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness  
of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the  
dead  
and the life of the world to come.  
Amen.**

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

May the Holy Spirit, O Lord,  
sanctify these gifts laid upon your altar,  
just as he filled with his power the womb of  
the Blessed Virgin Mary.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

**Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a  
son;  
and his name will be called Emmanuel.**

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Having received this pledge of eternal  
redemption,  
we pray, almighty God,  
that, as the feast day of our salvation draws  
ever nearer,  
so we may press forward all the more eagerly  
to the worthy celebration of the mystery of  
your Son's Nativity.  
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
Amen.

The pilgrims continue to come. Only God  
knows what each one of us brings, and with  
what kind of heart. We come mystically to  
this cave. We know the mess we bring and  
the often distracted heart that brings it. But  
this is all we have – all we are. One stretches  
out his arms to receive.

*Basil M Pennington OCSO*