



Sunday 21st December 2025

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Gospel Reading

Matthew 1.18-25

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

Now 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 fulfil 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, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Other Readings: Isaiah 7.10-16 Psalm 80.1-8,18-20 Romans 1.1-7

Homily

Thursday is Christmas Day! We welcome and celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Immanuel – God is with us. He brought the Kingdom of God to earth in his person and ministry; demonstrating the very nature and love of God - and all that this opens for humanity. This is the reason why Christians celebrate. "He's the reason for the season!" This is really good News. Outside of this there is only confused make-believe, sentiment and hyped commercialism. And the world desperately needs to know about the real Jesus and to benefit from the life he gives.

Mary and Joseph humbly accepted God's amazing will for them – risking disgrace – the sneers and gossip; or severe punishment. Joseph had to change his previous decision in order to obey God. So, Jesus was born into a Jewish family, fully human, the first among younger brothers and sisters. Not a myth, philosophy, idea, or angel. An historical person, he shared our common experience, living in every-day society.

But, he was also fully God – Immanuel - God is with us. Today's Epistle reading affirm this truth; "human – descended from David – declared with power to be the Son of

God". The Christmas Gospel declares; "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) Jesus' whole life and ministry demonstrated both his humanity and divine authority over nature, sickness and demons; and his un-broken relationship with God, his Father.

Jesus stands unique in all human history by his identity, life and ministry. The unique Saviour, bridging the gulf between sinful humanity and a holy God; making the way of forgiveness, reconciliation and our life as God's children. St Paul, writing to the Colossians affirms; "God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him – making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Col 1:19,20). No other religion, teacher, prophet, faith or philosophy could ever match this revelation or power. His Hebrew name (*Yeshua*) means 'The LORD saves'; "for he will save his people from all of their sins".

In this day, we really need to be secure and confident about the great treasure we have in the Gospel of Jesus. We may be surrounded by nay-sayers, loud alternative voices and influences, and be embarrassed by the church's mistakes, schisms and controversies, but the central historic truths about Jesus stand for ever. The secular mind-set rejects supernatural interventions, but the living God is the God of interventions and miracles. Society's fashions may change, but God's offer still extends to all humanity. The historic creeds declare what the Scriptures clearly teach and what the Church has always held to be Divine Truth. We don't need to be coy or defensive about this, but we do need to know what we believe and be confident in our day-to-day walk with God.

Having the creeds and sound teaching may be fine - but they, alone, don't produce practical, living faith. It takes a work of God's grace to bring us into life-changing faith – bridging the distance between head and heart. That often requires a deep, humbling experience, where we finally come to accept God's assessment of our needs. We can then accept his remedy, allowing Jesus to direct our daily life as Lord. Joseph had to change his resolved decision; choosing to accept the uncertain way of faith in order to obey God's will for him.

Christmas is the time to celebrate God's momentous move in sending Jesus, his Son, into this world, in order to save us and restore us to a trusting and loving relationship with him. The Christmas Story challenges us to affirm, or discover, renewed faith in the goodness of God in our walk with Jesus. The life that our Father God always intended for humanity.

Conversation Questions

1. In our personal welcome of Jesus, how can we discard the distractions of secular pressures and false traditions; And come to enjoy the wonder of God's love and grace?
2. How can we check, for ourselves, what the Bible actually teaches?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?

4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

God our redeemer,
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your Son:
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Eternal God,
as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,
so we wait for his coming in glory;
bring us through the birth pangs of this present age
to see, with her, our great salvation
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

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