

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
18th December 2022 - 4th Sunday of Advent

Readings (Year A): 1st: Isaiah 7:10-14. Psalm: 23:1-6. 2nd: Romans 1:1-7. **Gospel:** Matthew 1:18-24.

There is no escaping that Christmas is near. Everywhere the lights, the trees, the advertising, the shops, everywhere we look proclaims 'it's Christmas.'

Some of it has been going on for months, as we are well aware.

For us it is still Advent: still a time of waiting in patience for the Lord.

Advent spirituality is most relevant in a world where so many people are experiencing a winter of the spirit, a winter of discontent, a winter of 'how will we cope, how will we manage?' A winter of wilderness where 'terrifying demons stalk the land.'

Advent hears the call of the Baptist to recognise the source of our modern evils which as ever is sin. Advent encouraging us to wait in hope and not lose faith.

The annunciation to Joseph leaves him deeply troubled by Mary's mysterious pregnancy. Yet full of compassion for her, he did not wish to expose her to public disgrace.

His answer came in the dream when the angel told him to marry Mary, as the child was from the Holy Spirit. He did this, **obedience** enabled him to surmount his difficulties and spare Mary. Joseph declared his own 'Yes' to God, as we know Mary did.

In his 2020 apostolic letter on St Joseph "With a Father's heart," Pope Francis reflects on this event: "Though Joseph does not understand the bigger picture, he decides to protect Mary's dignity and her life. In his hesitation about how best to act, God helped him by enlightening his judgment.

Often in life, things happen whose meaning we do not understand. Our first reaction is often disappointment and even rebellion.

But Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the mysterious course of events. The story of the annunciation to Joseph draws out the rich river of Jewish memory. Matthew uses Joseph as his link with many of the great O.T. figures and the hopes they represented.

As we hear Joseph had a dream, we recall another Joseph who had dreams, one of which was his technicolour dream- coat.

We are linked with the Patriarchs, for this Joseph was the great -grandson of Abraham –Abraham the first recipient of divine revelation, the holy father of believers. 'Abraham, our father in faith' as the Roman Canon says

Then we hear that this child of Mary will save his people from their sins, leading them out of slavery. Suggestions of a new Moses surely.

Joseph himself is addressed by the angel as son of David. What memories of David tumble out before us.

David was a native of Bethlehem. He was but a boy-shepherd when the call of God entered his life to anoint him as the future king. He was revered in sacred story as the king who overcame the tribal rivalries and united the nation, who succeeded in liberating the land from foreign invaders and who established their capital city, Jerusalem. Jerusalem became the holy city, the site of the temple of God's presence on earth.

Who then is this child soon to enter upon the stage of history? Matthew is telling us that He is the new Abraham, source of divine revelation and faith for the people. He is the new Moses who will liberate his people from the slave-land of sin. He is the new David, shepherd and ideal king, leading his united people to the New Jerusalem, city of the presence of God.

The saints of the O.T. drew their strength and consolation from the words of promise “I will be with you.”

Now at the climax of history the promise is fulfilled. God is with us Emmanuel; a name which means ‘God-is-with-us.’

Centuries before, when Isaiah confronted the wavering king Ahaz, the name Emmanuel, was a sign that God was with his people.

In the opening verses of his gospel Matthew tells us that, and at the very close of it, Jesus, about to ascend to the Father promises to be with them always, yes to the end of time. **Maranatha: Come Lord Jesus.**

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