

Fourth Sunday of Advent – Year A

[Reading I: Isaiah 7:10-14](#)

[Responsorial Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6](#)

[Reading II: Romans 1:1-7](#)

[Gospel: Matthew 1:18-24](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/121822.cfm>



In the Gospel of Matthew, the background to the birth of Jesus is presented through the experience of Joseph. In Matthew's context of Jewish believers, the perspective of the male lineage is essential. The focus of the narrative is Christological – Who is Jesus? It is not intended to be a narrative history. It is to raise awareness about the origin of Jesus.

Joseph and Mary are betrothed. They have made a commitment to each other but have not begun to live together. It is far more than engagement, where a couple pledges to make a commitment at a future time. In betrothal, the couple is committed to each other. Often, the commitment was made, and then the husband prepared a home for them in which to live. It is in this in-between time that Mary becomes pregnant.

Scholars have debated why Joseph wanted to divorce Mary quietly. One school of thought was that he did not want to embarrass her. She was pregnant, and it was not his child. So he would end the relationship quietly. The other school argued that Joseph understood that the power of God conceived this child, and he wanted to back out and not get in God's way. Matthew's intent is not clear.

Matthew does make clear who this child will be. Joseph is called the Son of David. The expected Messiah was to come from the line of David, and Joseph was to be the link to the Davidic dynasty. Secondly, Joseph was ordered to name the child. In naming the child, Joseph was declaring him to be his son legally and, therefore, part of the Davidic line. If Jesus was just the son of Mary, he would not be of the Davidic line. Matthew concludes with the declaration that "this was to fulfill what the Lord has said through the prophet" to teach that Jesus is the one God had promised to send as a savior.

Matthew points to the verse that is in the first reading from Isaiah for this Sunday. King Ahaz was not one of the kings who were faithful to God. In the eighth century, before Jesus, Jerusalem was under siege. Isaiah challenged the king to trust in God. He was more interested in his military preparations. Isaiah confronted him and told him to ask for a sign from God. Ahaz, in a seemingly reverent response, dismisses him. Isaiah declared that God would give him a sign. The sign will be that the young woman (in Hebrew and it became virgin in Greek) would bear a son. God would give him a successor to the throne as a sign of God's promise to preserve Israel. This child will be a sign that God is protecting his people. Ahaz had a son, Hezekiah, who was much more dedicated to God and ruled with devotion and faithfulness.

Early Christians who read the Old Testament saw an even greater fulfillment of this promise in Jesus. Mary was a virgin who conceived by the action of God and bore the totally faithful son who brought forth God's reign. God was still active in the lives of God's people, and Jesus brought the fullness of salvation. The name given to the child, Emmanuel, which means God-with-us, was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, who was both Son of God and Son of Mary.

The second reading is the beginning of Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul was not the founder of the Christian community in Rome. He writes the letter to them to introduce himself, to attest that he is an apostle and that he proclaims the authentic message of the Gospel. In chapter 15, he shares that he plans to pass through Rome on his way to Spain. Paul attests that Jesus is the Son of God in power (in heaven) and that his death and resurrection establish this fact. Because he and the Roman community belong to Christ, they are called to be holy. We, like the Romans, are called to faith in Christ and holiness.

Key themes:

Mary, Mother of God

Virgin Birth

Role of Joseph

God-with-us

Faith and Trust

Reflection Questions

How did Mary and Joseph manifest faith and trust in God?

Mary and Joseph heard God's call and responded. How is God calling you, and what help do you need to respond?

How do you experience God-with-you in your life?

Prayer ideas

For the Church: that we, like Joseph, may wholeheartedly live our faith traditions and yet remain open to the mystery of God's unconventional work in our lives and the world around us

For openness of heart: that, like Mary and Joseph, we may enter into the mystery of God's loving actions and cooperate with the work of God even when we do not understand how to proceed

For freedom from judging others: that like Joseph, we may hold our judgments so that the work of God may unfold in the hearts and lives of those who are dear to us

For all who are awaiting the birth of a child or who are new parents: that they may recognize God's presence in their child and nurture the gift of life entrusted to their care

For a deepening of faith: that the Holy Spirit will lead us into a new and deeper relationship with Jesus and a better understanding of the humanity of Jesus