



## Co-operating with God's plan

Greetings my brothers & sisters in Christ, what a joy it is to be here, as we come together to worship and celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

I pray, that today's message will lift all our spirits, as we journey together, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, servants of Christ our King, committed to lives of service, in His Kingdom!

*Let us pray.*

*Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.*

*Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

On this the Fourth Sunday of Advent, our Gospel reading from Matthew, tells the story of the birth of Jesus, that we celebrate at Christmas, and causes us to reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation, that is when the son of God came down from heaven, took on a human form, and became a perfect union of both God and man.

We can't gloss over too quickly the difficult circumstances described in today's Gospel. The way that Joseph and Mary face these circumstances tells us much about these holy people and their faith in God.

Joseph and Mary are betrothed to be married. This is sometimes described as an engagement period, but it is more than that. Betrothal in first century Jewish culture was in fact the first part of the marriage contract. A breach of this contract was considered adultery.

Mary is found to be with child. If adultery is proven, the punishment might be death. Joseph has rights under Mosaic law, but chooses to act discreetly in his plans to break the marriage contract, so as to protect Mary. Then God intervenes.

The message of the angel of the Lord given to Joseph in his dream tells us much about the child that Mary bears and his role in God's plan.

1. He is conceived by the Holy Spirit.
2. His name will be Jesus, which in the Hebrew means "Yahweh saves."
3. He will be the fulfilment of the prophecy heard in today's first reading from Isaiah: ". . . The virgin shall be with child . . . and shall name him Emmanuel [God with us]."

Joseph does as the angel of the Lord directs. He takes Mary to be his wife and accepts the child in her womb as his own.

Joseph and Mary are both cooperative with God's plan.

They are both models for us of what it means to be faithful servants of God.

The Bible teaches us, that God breaks into human history, bringing divine plans to fruition through ordinary people. We see this pattern all through scripture, from the patriarch Abraham to the persecutor of Christians, Saul, who becomes the Apostle Paul. And from Deborah and Esther, who bring hope to their people, to Mary Magdalene, who was a witness to the Resurrection, sent as the "apostle to the apostles" with the Good News.

This pattern of God working through people is no less true in the most important divine plan in history, as the Word became flesh in Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

God used Mary and Joseph in a plan to turn the world upside-down, which was really setting everything right once more, in Jesus

So where is this God revealing God's self?

Well from our reading today, we can say it's certainly not in the "safe" world, but one would say at the edge, or at the bottom, among those people and places where we don't want to find God, where we don't look for God, where we don't expect God.

Could it be the way we've shaped Christianity, one would think it was all about being nice and middle class and "normal" and under the law. A closer look and understanding of the Gospels, of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are none of those things, so they might just be telling us we should be looking elsewhere for our status and dignity.

Maybe the reason that our knowledge of God is so limited is because we've been looking for God in places we consider nice and pretty. Instead, God chooses the ordinary and messy.

In one commentary I read in preparing today's message, it quoted "If Mary had appeared in Bethlehem clothed, as St. John says, with the sun, a crown of twelve stars on her head, and the moon under her feet [Revelation 12:1], then people would have fought to make room for her. Remember @ the baptism a fortnight ago, when our Liz told that beautiful story about a little boy called Peter and his question!

How he came to the understanding of why our Lord was born in a stable!

So our story as Christians, is about

God being totally vulnerable, totally poor, a little child, and If we're honest, this is not a fitting image for God.

It's telling us right away that God is not who we think God is!

Sadly, most people's image of God is that of jolly Santa, making a list and checking it twice, finding out who's naughty or nice.

It's certainly not this humble, helpless baby who has come to love us in ways that we're not ready to be loved.

What Christmas tells us is this:- God will find a way to care for those in need, using someone else if we fail to respond.

God will work out God's purposes through whoever is willing to listen to the promptings of their hearts.

While you and I will not be invited to such a momentous task as Joseph, we no less can take part in what God is doing.

Jesus makes it clear that small acts of providing food for the hungry and drink for the thirsty are of eternal significance.

In these small yet meaningful ways, we get to participate in the coming Reign of God by being God's hands and feet in the world. This is part of how God breaks into human history, bringing divine plans to fruition through ordinary people.

As we journey these last days to our celebration of Jesus' birth, our eyes should be open anew to how God is giving us the opportunity to respond to a divine invitation.

For in caring for those in need, we are serving the Emmanuel, the God who is with us, in Jesus.

When we show care for those who would otherwise be lost and left out, we are doing so for the one whose First Advent we celebrate, even as we await Jesus' coming again in glory.

**Amen**

## *Advent Prayer Devotional*

In this Advent season, we'll be sharing this story together—the story of how Jesus, our Savior, came into this world to save us. Together we'll celebrate how God kept His promise: "For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).w

