

Advent 4 - Year A

Sunday, December 18, 2022 • Thankful Memorial Episcopal Church
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[Isaiah 7:10-16](#) | [Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18](#) | [Romans 1:1-7](#) | [Matthew 1:18-25](#)

The season of Advent plays with our understanding of time ... and so I'm going to ask you to hold the message of the Christmas pageant in your heart while you let your mind wander back to the very beginning of the story - because that is where our Gospel reading drops in today.

This year is my favorite Advent/Christmas calendar configuration: when Christmas Day falls on a Sunday, that means we get a full week between Advent 4 - today - and finally celebrating Christmas ... talk about anticipation!

This is *my* favorite configuration, because I love Advent ... but I think it's also the *hardest* configuration for us as liturgical Christians, because **out there** Christmas is already in full swing ... but **in here** and **in here** we're still treasuring and pondering and waiting and hoping.

We often relate the expectation of Advent with Mary's story - from Annunciation to Nativity.

But today's Gospel invites us to consider things from Joseph's point of view.

Like Mary, Joseph's world was turned upside down with the news of an un-expected child.

Like Mary, Joseph was visited by a heavenly messenger telling him not to be afraid and informing him of his role in the unfolding of God's dream for the world.

Yet *unlike* Mary, Joseph could not feel the spark of hope beginning to grow inside him. *Unlike* Mary, Joseph did not experience a physical change to reassure him that the unimaginable was happening in and through him.

And still Joseph remained faithful and said “yes” in his own way: by taking care of Mary for 9 long months while disregarding the stares and whispers of a small, shame-and-honor-bound community, and - when the time came - by co-parenting with Almighty God a son who would save the whole world.

In her Advent poem titled *O Sapientia*, Madeleine L’Engle imagines what Mary might say about her husband:

*It was from Joseph first I learned
of love. Like me he was dismayed.
How easily he could have turned
me from his house; but, unafraid,
he put me not away from him
(O God-sent angel, pray for him).
Thus through his love was Love obeyed.*

*With Joseph I was always warmed
and cherished. Even in the stable
I knew that I would not be harmed.
And, though above the angels swarmed,
man’s love it was that made me able
to bear God’s love, wild, formidable,
to bear God’s will, through me performed.*

One of my favorite artistic depictions of the nativity is from a 15th century illuminated manuscript. In it, Mary relaxes in bed holding a book - perhaps praying the Psalms; and at the foot of the bed, Joseph sits on the floor holding the Word of God enfleshed in Jesus.

I love this image because it is subversive and sweet; and it reminds us that everyone gets a turn holding baby Jesus. No one who believes in a better world gets to skip the messy, diaper-changing work of ‘casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.’

And so during this final week of Advent anticipation, I invite us to spend time with St. Joseph and his example of faith and love. May we, like him, draw near to the heart of Mary who was the first to believe and proclaim the Good News of God with us; and may we, like Joseph, be brave and humble enough to care for God Incarnate as we encounter him in ourselves, in one another, and especially in those places and people we least expect.

Like Joseph, may we have the faith to play our part in bringing God's "wild, formidable" Love into a world in need.

Amen.