



LIVING THE GOSPEL

**4th Sunday of Advent
December 21st 2025**

Theme: "Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet."

Gathering Prayer

All: Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:18-24

¹⁸ This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph; being a man of honor and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. ²⁰ He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' ²² Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us.' ²⁴ When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Gospel Focus

"God has a plan!" more often than not, these words are said to us when we have been handed a large disappointment. In these cases, we're stuck wondering whether our dreams for ourselves were really contrary to God's larger plan. Or perhaps whether God even does have something in mind for us. In the Scriptures this week, the central proclamation of the prophet Isaiah, the apostle Paul, and the angel (and even the evangelist Matthew) is that God indeed does have a plan, for us and for our salvation. In this iteration of "God has a plan," it is because God has already done something good, that God has indeed been working on our behalf since time began. The lector is privileged to proclaim this same good news from the ambo, sharing God's great message of hope today. God's in breaking into history will be celebrated in less than one week!

Gospel Reflection

Today's young people are significantly more tolerant than their elders, according to a recent study. Young people think nothing of dating members of other races. On the other hand, studies of college students show that they are about 40 percent lower in empathy than students of the previous two or three decades. Schools find that they need to construct activities designed to enhance understanding and empathy, which go beyond tolerance.

Today's gospel brings to the fore the situation of Joseph, whose culture had little tolerance for a formally betrothed woman who was found to be with child by someone other than her intended. Joseph is a righteous man, faithful to all the demands of the Jewish Law. The strictest interpretation of the law would call for the death of the apparently adulterous Mary (Deut 22:23-27). But Joseph is unwilling to denounce her publicly and searches for a way out. There cannot be a secret divorce: two witnesses are needed, and Mary's pregnancy cannot be hidden for long.

Joseph's first solution is to avoid a public trial and divorce Mary quietly, without declaring the reasons (see Deut 24:1). This solution would preserve Joseph's reputation, but Mary will still be exposed to public shame. The only way to preserve Mary's honor would be for Joseph to complete the marriage to her and adopt the child as his own. In order for Joseph to make this choice, he has to shift focus away from concern about his own righteousness and reputation and turn emphatically toward Mary. Only when he can make her the center of his attention, allowing himself to feel her distress, can he make the divinely directed choice that will uphold her honor at the price of her own.

In so doing, Joseph mirrors the divine action of empathy with humankind manifested in the incarnation. Just as the Holy One rectifies the broken relationship with humanity by becoming one with us, so Joseph rescues a dishonorable and potentially deadly situation by choosing to unite himself completely to Mary. Joseph exemplifies what their son Jesus will later teach his followers: one must go far beyond what the law requires in order to truly fulfill it.

This is what St Paul calls "the obedience of faith" in his letter to the Romans. For Paul, obedience is not blindly following commands, but comes from hearing, "and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). In fact, the Greek word for *obedience* comes from the same root as does the verb "to hear." In the gospel, Joseph's ability to hear with his heart the cries of his beloved wife as well as the voice of our empathetic God leads to his faithful obedience. As Christmas approaches, it can be difficult for us to hear God's voice above the din of the many demands. When we pause each day to listen attentively, our faithful obedience, like that of Joseph, can have world-changing power as it creates the space for the Holy One to be ever birthed anew in our mind as God-with-us.

New Testament links

First Reading — Is 7: 10-14

¹⁰ The Lord spoke to Ahaz and said, ¹¹ 'Ask the Lord your God for a sign for yourself coming either from the depths of Sheol or from the heights above.' ¹² 'No,' Ahaz answered 'I will not put the Lord to the test.' ¹³ Then Isaiah said: 'Listen now, House of David: are you not satisfied with trying the patience of men without trying the patience of my God, too? ¹⁴ The Lord himself, therefore, will give you a sign. It is this: the maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel, a name which means "God-is-with-us."'

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

R: Let the Lord enter! He is the king of glory.

The Lord's is the earth and its fullness, the world and all its peoples.
It is he who set it on the seas; on the waters he made it firm. **(R)**

Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place?
The man with clean hands and pure heart, who desires not worthless things. **(R)**

He shall receive blessings from the Lord and reward from the God who saves him.
Such are the men who seek him, seek the face of the God of Jacob. **(R)**

Second Reading — Rom 1: 1-7

¹ From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus who has been called to be an apostle, and specially chosen to preach the Good News that God ² promised long ago through his prophets in the scriptures.³ This news is about the Son of God who, according to the human nature he took was a descendant of David: ⁴ it is about Jesus Christ our Lord who, in the order of the spirit, the spirit of holiness that was in him, was proclaimed Son of God in all his power through his resurrection from the dead. ⁵ Through him we received grace and our apostolic mission to preach the obedience of faith to all pagan nations in honour of his name. ⁶ You are one of these nations, and by his call belong to Jesus Christ. ⁷ To you all, then, who are God's beloved in Rome, called to be saints, may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send grace and peace.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

333. From the Incarnation to the Ascension, the life of the Word incarnate is surrounded by the adoration and service of angels. When God "brings the firstborn into the world, he says: 'Let all God's angels worship him.'" (*Heb 1:6.*) Their song of praise at the birth of Christ has not ceased resounding in the Church's praise: "Glory to God in the highest!" (*Lk 2:14.*) They protect Jesus in his infancy, serve him in the desert, strengthen him in his agony in the garden, when he could have been saved by them from the hands of his enemies as Israel had been. (Cf. *Mt 1:20; 2:13,19; 4:11; 26:53; 2 Macc 10:29-30; 11:8.*) Again, it is the angels who "evangelize" by proclaiming the Good News of Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection. (Cf. *Lk 2:8-14; Mk 16:5-7.*) They will be present at Christ's return, which they will announce, to serve at his judgment. (Cf. *Acts 1:10-11; Mt 13:41; 24:31; Lk 12:8-9.*)

437. To the shepherds, the angel announced the birth of Jesus as the Messiah promised to Israel: "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (*Lk 2:11*) From the beginning he was "the one whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world", conceived as "holy" in Mary's virginal womb. (*Jn 10:36; cf. Lk 1:35.*) God called Joseph to "take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit", so that Jesus, "who is called Christ", should be born of Joseph's spouse into the messianic lineage of David. (*Mt 1:20; cf. 1:16; Rom 1:1; 2 Tim 2:8; Rev 22:16.*)

1507. The risen Lord renews this mission ("In my name . . . they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." (*Mk 16:17-18.*)) and confirms it through the signs that the Church performs by invoking his name. (Cf. *Acts 9:34; 14:3.*) These signs demonstrate in a special way that Jesus is truly "God who saves." (Cf. *Mt 1:21; Acts 4:12.*)

1846. The Gospel is the revelation in Jesus Christ of God's mercy to sinners. (Cf. *Lk 15*) The angel announced to Joseph: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (*Mt 1:21.*) The same is true of the Eucharist, the sacrament of

redemption: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (*Mt* 26:28.)

2666. But the one name that contains everything is the one that the Son of God received in his incarnation: JESUS. The divine name may not be spoken by human lips, but by assuming our humanity The Word of God hands it over to us and we can invoke it: "Jesus," "YHWH saves." (Cf. *Ex* 3:14; 33:19-23; *Mt* 1:21.) The name "Jesus" contains all: God and man and the whole economy of creation and salvation. To pray "Jesus" is to invoke him and to call him within us. His name is the only one that contains the presence it signifies. Jesus is the Risen One, and whoever invokes the name of Jesus is welcoming the Son of God who loved him and who gave himself up for him. (*Rom* 10:13; *Acts* 2:21; 3:15-16; *Gal* 2:20.)

Sharing and Discussion

1. *Emmanuel – God is with us.* How does knowing His presence guide your daily choices, and what experiences have brought you to live in this awareness?
2. *Living with compassion.* In what areas of your life might you still follow rules or social expectations instead of responding with mercy and care, and how does Joseph's example inspire you to listen first to God's call?
3. *Opening the door to God.* What makes it hard for you to say "yes" to God—and what are you doing to help open that door a little more?

Closing Prayer

Leader: Loving God, hear these prayers as we wait for the coming of Emmanuel, God with us. Keep our eyes and hearts alert and attuned to your presence in our world. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.