



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 18, 2016
Introduction to the Word:



Advent is here and regardless of which church cycle we are in, the underlying theme is “*Prepare*.” Two ways: we *prepare* as this Advent season unfolds and we rely on **HOPE**. Hope is not this “looking at the world through rose-colored glasses” thing. Hope is tough stuff. It is not what our human nature typically defaults to when things are going wrong and the world seems to be crumbling around us. Hope requires an inner strength, a reliance on God, knowing His love for us will always get us through. This is why Hope is not a thing but a person.

During our first week of Advent we entered into “Call and Response” seek to look for the moments to Praise the Lord, pause and Hmm and even respond to His amazing grace with “Amen”.

During our second week of Advent we tackled the question – do we want to resemble Jesus? If we answered: “Yes” then we would accept the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, embrace the Spirit of counsel and might and desire the spirit of knowledge and the Reverence of the Lord as we call out “Come Lord Jesus.”

Now our Third Sunday calls us to Hope (the person of Jesus) as our constant beacon even in the moments when the Jolly Season we approach is not so Jolly. Even as we discover, John the Baptist is not “rejoicing”, but he wants assurances of who the Messiah is – and often so do we.

Here we are at the Fourth Sunday and we are called to trust in Emmanuel – “that God is with us”. The question before us is if we do, and how we can more each day of our life.

Warm-Up:



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Once again, God intervened, this time in the life of Joseph. Through his dream God revealed to him the divine nature of the life in the womb of Mary. It was not the fruit of infidelity, but rather the fruit of Mary's fidelity to God.

Can you identify a moment in your life (perhaps it was God's intervention) which confounded you, which perhaps turned your world upside down? If so, how did you respond? What happened, over time, to this event in your life?

CALL TO PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

Leader: We wait in joyful hope for the *coming again* of Jesus Christ. He has promised to return in all His glory in order to lead us to share in the fullness of His own life so that we, in turn, may bring this life and light to our communities and our world.

Lord Jesus, you came to reveal to us the fullness of God's love, **Lord, have mercy.**
Christ Jesus, our Emmanuel, God-with-us, God-for-us, **Christ, have mercy.**
Lord Jesus, our most certain way to the Father/Mother, **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:

*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,
and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart
to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in name of
Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(Please select one person –not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below.)

FIRST READING: Isaiah 7:10-14

Once again the Lord spoke to Ahaz and said, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign for yourself coming either from the depths of Sheol or from the heights above." "No," Ahaz answered, "I will not put the Lord to the test." 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? 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 Emmanuel. The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

SECOND READING: Romans 1:1-7

From Paul, called to be an apostle and servant of Christ Jesus, and specially chosen to preach the Good News that God promised long ago through his prophets in the scriptures. This news is



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about the Son of God who, according to the human nature he took, was a descendant of David: 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.

Through him we received grace and our apostolic mission to preach the obedience of faith to all pagan nations in honor of his name. You are one of these nations, and by his call belong to Jesus Christ. 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. The Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

GOSPEL: Matthew 1:18-24

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

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. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honor and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. 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. 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."

Now all this took place to fulfill the words spoken by the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-is.'" When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

The Gospel of the Lord **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

COMMENTARY:

[You may also as a group wish to listen again to the Audio of the Lord's Day Message](#)

It is only human and logical that we make plans for ourselves in life. We may have chosen a path, have a dream, and do what we need to secure it. Such was the life of Mary and Joseph, a young couple in love in Palestine preparing for a life together. We can imagine that they had gone through the normal stages of courting, according to their culture, and looked forward to a life together. Joseph had a profession, and they would build their lives on that. Perhaps they had talked, as all young couples do, about the number of children that they hoped to bring into the world together.

Suddenly, the unexpected happened. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and asked her to be the mother of the Saviour, the Messiah, the long-awaited One. With faith and courage Mary said "Yes" to the angel. She knew from the Scriptures she heard in the synagogue in Nazareth that if God was going to fulfill his promise in and through her, that God would be faithful to her and give her the grace to bring about the birth of the Saviour of the world. We can only imagine how Mary broke this news to Joseph, and the very human and logical response of her intended.



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Thomas a Kempis, a well-known Catholic spiritual writer of the early fifteenth century, in his book *The Imitation of Christ*, wrote: "Man proposes, but God disposes". We can all relate to these words of wisdom, as we have experienced them in our own lives. We have made plans, but something came about which did not allow us to see the realization and fulfillment of our plans. It may have been about our plans for our education, for our profession, in a relationship, as well as in our spiritual life. We may have even made many promises or propositions to God, but things did not turn out the way that we had planned. This may have brought frustration, doubt and fear. We may never have "gotten over it". Or, over time we may have seen the hand of God, answering our prayer, fulfilling our plan, in a way we never imagined. Perhaps we are never prepared for the surprises of God, no matter what age we are, or what experiences are ours. Hold on, God is not finished with us yet!

Our Gospel reveals the power of God. In order to bring us to fullness of life in him, God intervenes in human history, and our history. In order to bring Joseph to the fullness of life, he intervened in his personal life, revealing the divine nature of the life in the womb of Mary, the life that he would love and protect as her husband and the 'father' of Jesus. It is significant that Joseph is called "a man of honour". Although so little is known of the historical Saint Joseph, we can take from this that he was a devout Jew, a hard-working and respected man, and one who longed for the coming of the Messiah. Suddenly, he found himself in the middle of the unfolding of this great event of the birth of the Messiah. He received and accepted the dream with faith and confidence in God, and throughout his life fulfilled the mission to which God had called him. This divine intervention, and the many other mysterious events of his life, must have made him realize how present God was in his life, and the importance of his life in the unfolding plan of God.

Our Advent Season has been about us choosing to "Celebrate Differently". Have we wasted this period of waiting, or have we embraced it? Have we chosen to Praise the Lord, pause and Hmm and even respond to His amazing grace with "Amen"? Have we sought to say often "Come Lord Jesus" and chosen to resemble Jesus in our life? Have we looked for the time to call upon Hope (the person of Jesus) as our constant beacon even in the moments when the Jolly Season we approach is not so Jolly? Do we choose to totally be enveloped with Emmanuel (God is With Us) even in the struggles of the season?

Mary and Joseph teach us much in life, but in this Season they also model for us how to Celebrate Differently. May the remaining days until the great celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord lead us to do just that.

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*



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Questions for Reflection and Discussion: (15-20 minutes)

"When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do" (Matthew 1:18-24)
Joseph believed in the intervention of God in his life, and the words he heard in his dream.

- a) In your life with God, how have you done what He told you to do?
- b) How did you overcome any resistance to God's revelation, intervention, and surprises?

This week, make a special effort to be aware of how the Lord is "appearing" to you. Don't only think of this in relation to your dreams, like Joseph, but in all that surrounds you - the people, events and activities of the week. Especially in the surprises, look for how the Lord is revealing to you His love, and His call to be His disciple and steward. Discuss as a group how you will do that?

Intercessions:

Leader: Our response: Lord Hear us

For our Holy Father and for all bishops and priests: may they continue to serve the people of God with joyful and thankful hearts and inspire each one of us to a deeper life of prayer. We pray to the Lord

For areas of the world impacted by poverty and strife, remembering especially our parish mission in Haiti, the orphanage we sponsor in Bethlehem, our school in Kenya, Africa. May these nations and peoples also find serenity, and encounter the Prince of Peace through our generosity. We pray to the Lord.

For those who are isolated or lonely, for those who carry the cross of sickness and for all who care for them: may they be consoled by their friendship with Jesus who is God with us. We pray to the Lord.

For those who are searching and seeking direction, purpose and meaning for their lives during this Holy Season. May we as Disciples of Christ help them to find the way to return to the practice of the faith. We pray to the Lord.

For all who have died and await the kingdom, and for the intentions recorded in the Parish Book of Prayer. We pray to the Lord.

Leader: Let us seek the intercession of the Patroness of our Parish as we pray: **Hail Mary**

Closing Activity and Prayer (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. You may wish to create and add petitions of prayer at this time. This time also intent to provide moments to connect and "outreach" to the larger community.)



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GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:

GROUP PRAYER COMMITMENT

Please consider offering a **Holy Hour in our Adoration Chapel** – either as a group or individually – for the intentions of the parish common good and for the objectives of our pastoral priorities. Remember also our Pastor, our Pastoral Team.

GROUP ACTION:

- Consider your plans as a group for 2017....are you leaving room for how the Lord is revealing to you His love, and His call to be His disciple and steward.

Let us pray (together)
Almighty God,
in your own mysterious way, you revealed to Joseph
the truth of the conception of the Messiah,
and the faithfulness of Mary - his intended - to God.
Help us to come to a greater understanding, appreciation, and cooperation
with the mysteries in our lives, so that we, too, may be faithful
and fulfill our mission.
We ask this through the Lord Jesus, who lives and reigns with the Father,
and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever. Amen.

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