

As we draw closer to Christmas
It is normal to begin focusing more and more on the Christ child
Always right there next to any child is the mother
Sometimes the father can get lost in the crowd
I think that can happen to Joseph as well
In fact, in all of SS Joseph never speaks
He is always somewhat in the background
But just because he doesn't speak
Does not mean he has nothing to say
He is a man of action
Not empty words
He leads us by example
We have an example of his righteousness today
But first, we get an example not to follow
Overriding both these examples is a lesson about God
He is present and faithful always
And he is right here in our midst
Even In the most fearful of times

In our reading from Isaiah, we meet King Ahaz
He was the king of Judah
The southern part of Israel after they split from each other
The king of the northern part of Israel (Ephraim) was being threatened
He joined forces with a neighboring king to defend against the
Assyrians
Together they were attacking Judah
They wanted to put their man in as king
And have them join in their war on Assyria

Ahaz was terrified

He was in danger on both sides

Plus, he was the direct descendent of David

He thought that is he died

The line of David would die

Then what would come of God's promise?

So Ahaz was considering making a treaty with Assyria

The less of two evils in his eyes

But Isaiah had counseled him not to do this in an earlier war

In today's reading, Isaiah returns to Ahaz

He counseled faithfulness

And God would reward Ahaz and Judah with victory

But Ahaz had not been faithful

And he was afraid God would take this out on him

So when Isaiah offers him to ask for a sign

Any sign he might wish

To prove God would save his nation

Ahaz refuses

He feigns piety and humility

I will not ask!

I will not tempt the Lord!

Isaiah is furious with Ahaz

And God gives a sign through Isaiah

The virgin shall conceive and bear a son

Literally, this is translated young woman

Many Scripture scholars believe this has a double fulfillment

A partial fulfillment at the time

And a complete fulfillment with the birth of Christ

In the partial fulfillment

They suggest that Ahaz would have a son

An heir to the line of David

And the name given this child would be a sign

Emmanuel: 'with us God'

Showing God is present and faithful

Then we jump 600 years

Our Gospel finds Joseph wrestling with a difficult predicament

He is a righteous man

A faithful Jew

Betrothed to a young woman

For Jews of this time

A betrothal is a commitment between a man and a woman

It was permanent; there was no backing out

**A woman who was not a virgin would probably not be allowed
to marry**

And the law was clear

If a betrothed woman was found to be pregnant

Especially as a result of adultery

She was to be stoned

By every code he lived by Joseph had little choice

He would be expected to expose Mary for her supposed sin

But he is a righteous man

He walked with God and was a faithful Jew

So he elects to show mercy

He decides to divorce her quietly

At least saving her life

Then God steps in

Sending an angel to Joseph in a dream

Using the same greeting he spoke to Mary at the Annunciation

Do not be afraid

Mary's response to the angel was a spoken word

Be it done unto me according to your word

Joseph's response is through his action

He did as the angel commanded

And took his wife into his home

But Joseph was given one more assignment

He would be given the right to name this child

An act reserved for the father

And the name given is another sign

Jesus: meaning God saves

Just as Mary was chosen to be the mother of the Christ child

Joseph was chosen to be the foster father

Humanly speaking, one would think that now everything would be perfect

After all, God sent his angel to set things up

To deliver his message to both parents

He would see that things would be smooth sailing for this family

But it doesn't go that way

Mary only sees the angel one time

Then he departed from her

She finds herself expecting a child without a husband

Off she goes to visit her cousin

Taking a 3 to 4 day journey

Over treacherous roads
And through territory filled with thieves and bandits
When she returns, she is threatened with divorce
And then when she is about to deliver the baby
They have to go to Bethlehem
To fulfill a government edict
Only to find the inn filled
So they have the baby in a stable
Surrounded by shepherds and animals
Then they discover King Herod has heard about this new born king
And is seeking to kill him
So they are instructed to flee to Egypt
After a time, they return to Nazareth
Where Joseph makes a living as a carpenter
Living a simple life
And when they take the child to the Temple
They are greeted with a warning
This child will be the downfall of many
And Mary's heart will be pierced with a sword
When he is 12, they lose him for 3 days in a large city
But through it all
God is there, and He is faithful

When faced with difficulties in this life
Whether they are of our own choosing
Or whether they are imposed upon us
Follow Joseph's example
Know God is there

And that He is faithful

He will lead us through turbulent moments

In our families

In our job

In our world

He is faithful

And he calls us to follow in faith

As Joseph did