

As we enter this last week of Advent

Our focus changes a bit

For the last 3 weeks the focus has been on preparing the way

Repentance and conversion of heart

Now we begin to anticipate who it is that is coming

In our readings today we have 2 names for Christ

Emmanuel, or God is with us

And Jesus, or God saves

The first tells us who Jesus is

His identity as both God and man

And the second tells us what he will do

He will save us from our sins

In our first reading we again encounter King Ahaz

A king of David's line who believed in the Davidic promise

But was childless himself

So he wondered how the Davidic line would continue

And since he had lost his faith

And was conspiring with the pagan Assyrian kingdom

Against his own people

He was in a quandary

Isaiah had already tried to convince him to remain faithful

But Ahaz turned away

He liked his plan over God's plan

So as things got more desperate

Isaiah tries again

In a false show of piety and humility

Ahaz refuses to listen

I will not tempt my Lord

So Isaiah gives him this sign

A virgin will be with child

And the child's name will be Emmanuel

Or God is with us

We see again a partial and a more complete fulfillment

Scripture studies tell us the word for virgin

Can be translated to mean a young girl

And one of Ahaz's young wives would give him a child

The Davidic line would continue

But this prophecy was fully fulfilled with Mary

When the virgin mother gave birth to her son

God is with us and continues to be with us

St Matthew tells us that Mary was betrothed to Joseph

For the Israelite community

Betrothal had the permanence of marriage

A woman found pregnant during this time would face being stoned

So Joseph is not sure what to do

He knows the child is not his

But he knows Mary

Had she explained things to him?

Even then, questions would remain

What should he do?

Even if he was convinced this was of God

And something magnificent was to happen

What role was there for him?

So, because he was a righteous man

He decided to divorce her quietly

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream

Joseph, Son of David

Calling him by name and title

This is the fulfillment of the prophecy to David

That a king would be born from his line to rule Israel

Do not be afraid to take Mary into your home

Joseph would have a role in this child's life

He would have a role in Mary's life

Joseph would be charged with naming the boy

The traditional role of the father

Another detail is that Joseph was asleep when the angel came to him

He was asleep in more than one way

In a way, his doubt was a kind of sleep

And at the end he awoke

Again, more than just getting out of bed in the morning

He was awake in every sense

His doubt now gone

Obedient to the invitation the angel presented

In contrast to Ahaz

Joseph placed his plan in the hands of God

His vocation was to be the visible father of the visible God on earth

I am sure this encounter with the angel did not answer every question

But it was enough to open his heart

And make room for Mary and her son

That is one of the goals of Advent

An invitation for each of us

To open our hearts

Not to have all our doubts and questions answered

But to get ourselves out of the way

And make room for God in our heart

God knows this might be a bit frightening

What is he asking of me in my life?

Where is He leading me?

Is He going to take me from my family and loved ones?

Is He going to take them from me?

Will I be able to do what he is asking?

These questions and so many more

So he comes to us in a way that is not frightening

He does not appear with an army behind him

With a show of power

He comes to us as the most innocent and defenseless thing we know

He comes as a baby

Totally dependent on his parents as every baby is

Asking for us to make a bit of room in our heart

He is Emmanuel

God with us

He is present in our lives

In ways we can never imagine

Fulfilling his promise for all time

But not only is he with us

He is Jesus

He saves us from our sin

Both of these are intricately woven together

Emmanuel and Jesus

Jesus and Emmanuel

His divinity united to our humanity

So our humanity might be raised to his divinity

He saves us by giving us the best gift he could ever give

Himself

Better than any created thing

Like a married couple

The rings they exchange

Beautiful gifts

They are made more beautiful because of what they represent

The gift of each other to the other

Losing an engagement ring hurts

Because of what it represents

Losing a spouse hurts more

It is not the ring that makes one happy

It is the gift of the spouse

And as beautiful as marriage is

It is only a glimmer of the love God has for each of us

A love that is so great that God with us

Comes to save us

We will never escape pain and suffering in this world

God himself did not try to escape these things

He became one of us to show us the path

To invite us to walk with him

To give us hope in eternal life

Ahaz did not know what tomorrow would bring

He faced it with trepidation

Joseph did not know what tomorrow would bring

He faced it with faith and hope

We do not know what tomorrow will bring

We have a choice to make

Do I walk with Ahaz?

Following my plan, my dream

Hoping in human strength

Or do I walk with Joseph

In faith and hope in the One who is with us

Giving myself to the One who saves us