



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Advent December 18, 2016

Slave of Jesus

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Lately I've come to appreciate Joseph in ways that belie his rare appearance in Scripture. We know very little about him. At Christmas, he's the husband who didn't abandon Mary when Jewish law told him he could. In Christian art, he's frequently the "third wheel" in pictures of the Nativity focused on Mary and Jesus.

In today's readings, we have one of the three Joseph stories that appear in Matthew's Gospel. After reading all of them, I've concluded that Joseph

never got a full night's sleep and was remarkably attentive to messages conveyed by angels, because in each story he's awakened from a dream and told what to do. And then he does it. I envy his absolute confidence in God's unusual form of communication and admire the care he exhibits for his wife and adopted son. So many times we spend energy trying to be the center of attention. We want to control our lives and dictate the path we'll follow. Joseph is our reminder that they serve God who simply do his will without question.

Paul talks about service in a different way. He calls himself a slave of Jesus, in whose service he gladly preaches and even suffers. And Paul reminds us we're called to holiness, which has nothing to do with being the center of attention. Holiness is aligning ourselves with God's will and being willing to change course when the angel of the Lord comes in with a different plan.

Maybe the question for us this Advent is, "Where is God calling us to holiness now?" †

"Joseph reminds us that we serve God when we do his will without question."

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 7:10-14

"The Lord himself will give you a sign; the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel."

Romans 1:1-7

"Through [Jesus Christ, our Lord] we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith."

Matthew 1:18-24

"When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him."

A Word From Pope Francis

Joseph was a man attentive to the messages that came to him from the depths of his heart and from on high. He did not persist in following his own plan for his life, he did not allow bitterness to poison his soul; rather, he was ready to make himself available to the news that, in a such a bewildering way, was being presented to him.... And Joseph thereby became even freer and greater. By accepting himself according to God's design, Joseph fully finds himself, beyond himself. His freedom to renounce even what is his, the possession of his very life, challenges us and shows us the way.

— Angelus,
December 22, 2013



REFLECTION QUESTIONS QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- How can I become a "slave of Jesus" this Advent and Christmas season?
- What do I admire most about St. Joseph? How can I live more like him?



Living Advent Like Mary

By Kathy Coffey

Mary models the perfect response to God's unexpected, even scandalous intervention into her life. When she told Gabriel, "May it be done to me according to your word," she had no guarantees, no script foretelling the future. All she had learned was the trust handed on by great-great-grandmothers: If it comes from God's hands, it must be perfectly tailored for me.

In times of central heating and plentiful food supplies, we no longer battle the winter as our ancestors did,

finding it a precarious season to stay alive. Isolated from others, running low on resources, great-grandparents endured many cold, gloomy nights. How they must've rejoiced at those glints of light in dark forests, when almost

imperceptibly the planet tilted toward spring and the days became longer.

We also have reasons for despair, crippling fears, anxiety over how much we need to do before Christmas. If problems are more serious, do we run from them or lean into them, wondering what they might teach us? Can we befriend our pain, knowing we're more than its sting? Could we embrace, for once, an imperfect holiday not scripted by Martha Stewart but perhaps closer to the first, where an

unmarried couple had to scrounge an inhospitable place to have a baby?

It's a good time to ask ourselves if we let bitterness and cynicism poison our hearts. WE are conscious of our own limitations. GOD keeps reminding us of our high calling, royal lineage, and a mission so impeccably suited to our talents and abilities, no one else in the world can do it. Again, Mary is the perfect model. She might not understand half the titles given her son in the "Hallelujah Chorus" of Handel's *Messiah*: Mighty God? Prince of Peace? Such language is better suited to a royal citadel than a poor village named Nazareth. While her questions are natural, she never wimps out with, "I don't deserve this honor." Instead, she rises to the occasion. †

Source: *Liguorian*, December 2015

Nothing Is Impossible With God

By Patricia Mathson

The Gospels this week center on how God works through people.

These Gospels tell us the stories of Joseph, Mary, and Elizabeth, who cooperate with God's plan for the Chosen People. They are an example of faith for all of us.

"The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her'" (Matthew 1:20).

We see that Joseph does the will of God by going ahead with his marriage

to Mary. He places his trust in God, even though he is worried. We, too, are to trust in God in the difficult times of our lives. It makes all the difference.

Have you ever been scared? We know that God is always with us, but sometimes we are still afraid. We, too, are called to trust God in our lives. During Advent we look forward to the celebration of Christmas. This season is not so much about what we do but about what God has done for us. We remember all that God has done for us as individuals and as a family. We have much for which to be thankful this season, especially for God's love for each of us. †

Source: *Live Advent at Home*, © 2011 Liguori



Lord, you are Emmanuel, "God with us." Open the eyes and ears of my heart that I may see your presence in every person I meet and hear your voice in the cry of the poor.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,

Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 19–24

Mon. Advent Weekday:
Jgs 13:2–7, 24–25a / Lk 1:5–25
Tue. Advent Weekday:
Is 7:10–14 / Lk 1:26–38
Wed. Advent Weekday: Sg 2:8–14 or
Zep 3:14–18a / Lk 1:39–45

Thu. Advent Weekday:
1 Sm 1:24–28 / Lk 1:46–56
Fri. Advent Weekday:
MI 3:1–4, 23–24 / Lk 1:57–66
Sat. Advent Weekday:
2 Sm 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16 / Lk 1:67–79