

Willing to Follow a Dream

Scripture Background

This information isn't meant to be read aloud, but as background for the leader. If helpful, share some of it in conversation with the group.

In its historical context, the passage from Isaiah today is God's promise to the endangered nation of the Jews that King David's line will continue, even though their kingdom is on the verge of being conquered. Their nation is under siege from small surrounding kingdoms as well as the mighty empire of Assyria. The writing is on the wall, and soon the capital of Jerusalem will be destroyed and the people will be carried off as captives to Babylon. Yet God promises something beyond imagining, "the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son." Christians, of course, read this as a prophecy of Jesus' birth to Mary.

Opening Prayer

Pray the following aloud together, beginning with the Sign of the Cross:

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God of Light and God of Darkness,
thank you for this chance to slow down
and listen to your Word for us.

Open our eyes, ears, minds, and our hearts
so that we experience how you are alive and active in our lives today.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:18-24

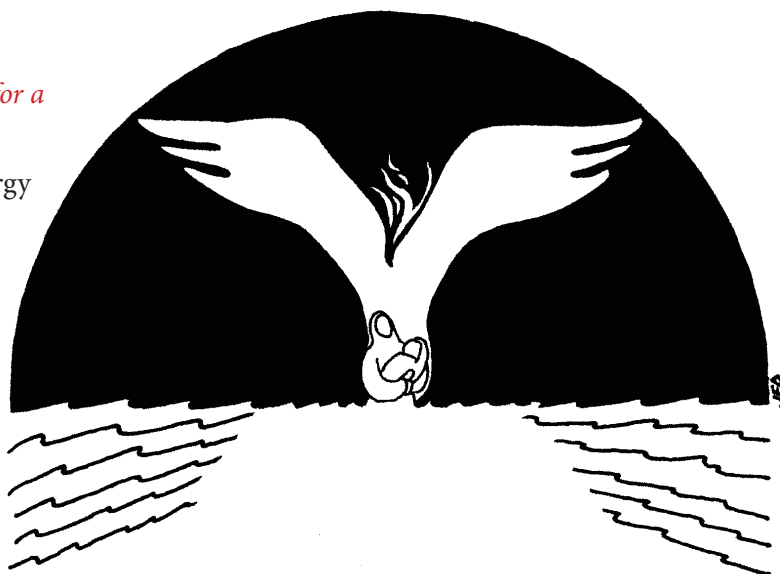
Ask someone to read this passage aloud, then pause for a minute of silence.

Ask: What struck you about this reading or the liturgy this week?

Allow for sharing. Move on to the next section once the sharing has died down.

Reflections on the Reading

Invite each person in the circle to read one paragraph aloud:



December 21, 2025 • Year A

4th Sunday of Advent

- ▶ Isaiah 7:10-14 • Prophecy of Emmanuel
- ▶ Romans 1:1-7 • Greetings from Paul
- ▶ Matthew 1:18-24 • The birth of Jesus

We know very little about Jesus' earthly father, Joseph. The only glimpses we get of him are in the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel, including this passage today. From these few verses, however, we see a picture of a sensitive man of great integrity who was willing to change direction in trust when given guidance from God. Just as Mary was asked to take a tremendous leap of faith in saying yes to bearing Jesus, Joseph also was asked to trust in a situation that didn't make rational sense.

According to Jewish tradition, Mary and Joseph were legally married although they were still in their "engagement period." We can imagine Joseph's great inner turmoil upon discovering Mary was pregnant—but not by him. It would have been a great shame to Joseph, personally and culturally. Legally, he was permitted to have her stoned to death, but he chose the more compassionate route, deciding to divorce her quietly rather than have her publicly humiliated and killed. That way, she would be able to return to the protection of her family to raise the child.

A dream changed everything. Without any guarantees that what he dreamed was real or trustworthy, Joseph woke up and followed the angel's instructions. Then three other times in Jesus' early life Joseph did what he was commanded in a dream, taking Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod and settling in the town of Nazareth to raise him. In doing so, he saved Jesus' life. It took both him *and* Mary working together and being open to unimagined directions to bring Jesus safely to adulthood.

Questions for Discussion

Read each question aloud, one at a time, followed by time for sharing.

- ① When you think of St. Joseph, what comes to mind?
- ② Share a story of a parent you know having the courage to do something that seemed crazy, counter-cultural, or just plain different, but proved to be for the best of his/her child.
- ③ Have you ever had any experiences of receiving directions or guidance from God that made you change course and do something different than what you had planned? How did you know to trust it?

Closing Prayer

Pray the following aloud together:

Lord, may what we have heard and reflected on today inspire us to go out from here to be better disciples in our daily lives.

May we be a blessing to all those we encounter this coming week.

Amen.