



THURSDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT
MATTHEW 1:18-25 (NRSV)

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his

people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

REFLECTION BY FR. DANIEL

As I think of Joseph, I am reminded how one is never sent by God alone. He always sends a helpmate to carry the load. In the Lord of the Rings, Samwise Gamgee was sent to be with Frodo in carrying the ring. Jesus sent the disciples out two by two to help each other proclaim the Gospel. And my favorite station in

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the Stations of the Cross is number five, when Simon of Cyrene is pulled in to help Jesus carry his cross. If Jesus had help to carry his cross and showed us the example for carrying one, we then are not to carry our own crosses alone. All too often, we act like we are and sometimes even push away the very people God sends in our lives to help us lighten the load. Joseph was that person for Mary. I think of the work Mary had to do. It could never have been done alone and God did not design it to be done alone. God did not do that to her and would not do that. He sent Joseph, a quiet and steadfast man to assist her in the enormous task that lay ahead of her. It would be great if all husbands and wives saw that their primary relationship in the marital bond is one of helpmate. On the journey in this life, God sends people to assist us in carrying the crosses and in doing the work of the Lord. The reading today reminds us that Joseph was righteous and would never hurt Mary by exposing her to public disgrace but wanted to care for her in a quiet way. God asked something else of him in his care for her and he faithfully took it on. It would include journeying to Bethlehem with her who was with child and struggling to find a place for her to have her baby; taking the family to Egypt while Herod called for the massacre of boys under the age of 2; and finding a home in Nazareth for Mary to care for Jesus while he grew up. John Paul II wrote an apostolic exhortation entitled, *Redemptoris Custos*, which is Guardian of the Redeemer. Joseph is known as the protector and caretaker of the Holy Family. Husbands and Fathers have that role after the role of St. Joseph. Some today would find that outdated image of the role of men in the family, however, it certainly would be different if more men took that role seriously and lived it out under the protection of St. Joseph. No one is called to do the work of God alone so it is important for us to pay attention to the people he has sent to help us carry the load of the cross.

FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Mary was going to be married to a man named Joseph. Joseph was part of the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as Jesse, David, and Solomon. He was part of the family that God had promised to send his savior through. An angel also spoke to Joseph. The angel explained that Mary was going to be giving birth to a son given to her by the Spirit of God. The angel told him that he was to name the baby Jesus. The name Jesus means the Lord saves. Joseph obeyed God and was the final earthly father in the family God had set apart to bring the savior into the world.

TALK TOGETHER AS A FAMILY

Talk together as a family of who in your life you believe has been sent by God to help you in your Christian journey. Discuss how different it would be if they were not in your life and how you might be important to others in their lives. Explore ways to thank them for their presence in your life and for all that they have done to lighten your load.

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