

Dear Parishioners,

This weekend we celebrate the 4th Sunday of Advent. In a few days, we will be celebrating Christmas: the coming of the Lord. Today's Gospel is an annunciation to Joseph that Mary would conceive and bear a son by the Holy Spirit. The birth of Jesus Christ came about ... through the Holy Spirit. Yet, by God's choice, the cooperation of an ordinary man and an ordinary woman was necessary. Joseph and Mary heard God's word announcing salvation and obeyed it. Joseph's response made a difference. He could have opted to drop out of the marriage. He could have refused legal paternity of Jesus.

Instead, he chose to be the catalyst by which God's plan becomes a reality. He gave the name and, by giving the name, gave himself. He accepted to cooperate with God so that we can have the Savior, the one who delivers us from slavery of sin and lead us to God.

Today's Gospel tells us that Joseph was a "righteous man." Indeed, he was. His justice is demonstrated first in his decision not to expose Mary to the law, which would have given him some personal satisfaction. His justice is again proven when he becomes the agent of God's justice by his unquestioning obedience to God's command.

Joseph's response made a difference because he decides to obey the Angel, to obey God. He commits himself to God's plan, challenging as it will surely be. Our small human acts of mercy may seem inadequate or unimportant, but when they participate in the divine mercy that God has shown repeatedly, they may themselves lead to something greater.

Paul reminds us of our mission to cooperate with God when he writes in his letter to the Romans that we have received the grace of Apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith and we are called to belong to Jesus Christ. God's choice to seek human cooperation in bringing about salvation is not limited to Mary and Joseph but continues in our own hearing of God's word and obedience to God's will.

The birth of Jesus isn't simply a historical event that happened long ago but is a present experience of "God-with-us" Emmanuel. Though unnamed in the Gospels, we are to be the Josephs who dream dreams and the Marys who give birth to this child who saves. We make a home for Emmanuel whenever we make a home for those around us. We are now to be the risen presence of Christ in our world, we are to make the Gospel known, and we are to do all that God commands us to. This is how "God is with us."

As we celebrate Christmas this year, my heart is filled with gratitude for each of you. The joy of this season isn't found only in decorations or gifts, but also in the love we share as a parish family and in the miracle of Christ's birth.

Christmas reminds us that God chose to enter our world in the most humble way, bringing light into darkness and hope into every heart. My prayer is that you feel that same light shining in your homes, your families, and your daily lives.

May laughter fill your gatherings, may peace settle in your hearts, and may kindness guide your steps into the New Year.

Thank you for the ways you live out your faith and support one another — you are a true blessing to our community.

I wish you a joyful Christmas and a New Year full of hope, renewal, and God's abundant love.

With warmth and prayers,

Fr. Edmond Aristil