

## **The Fourth Sunday of Advent December 18, 2016**

In today's Gospel, Matthew tells us about St. Joseph. Now what we're told has nothing to do with proving the miracle of the virgin birth, but to reveal what it means to be a just person who is receptive to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew introduces us to Joseph as a man whose faith was strong enough to believe that God might be doing something he himself had never anticipated. In Joseph's dilemma we see someone seek to be faithful when justice seems at odds with mercy.

As he followed the command to take Mary home without regard for his reputation and the potential for scandal, Joseph demonstrated a rare combination of humility and strength.

The way those two qualities intermingled in his soul combined into a profound reverence for the Lord that filled him with the conviction that God would guide them through what must have seemed a really heart-wrenching situation.

Joseph's choice had to be made at one particular moment, but his whole life had prepared him for it, and he would live its consequences for the rest of his days. Joseph could never have imagined the impact his decision would have on history.

None of us ever really know how far the effects of our choices will spread. Instead, we can only hope that we, like Joseph, can be receptive to the Spirit's inspirations. That's exactly what Paul was talking about in his letter to the Romans. Joseph understood it as being open to dreams; Paul calls it being holy.

In this fourth week of Advent, these readings invite us to pray for Joseph's kind of openness to God's unpredictable projects for our world. As we kindle our fourth

candle let us pray that we might open our minds to see beyond our own dreams and schemes so that Emmanuel may be ever more present in us and through us.

And to help us do exactly that, I want to spend a little time today talking about some programs we're offering starting in January and February.

And I'll start with a program centered on the Holy Spirit called "The Wild Goose". Now that phrase may seem a little strange but "The Wild Goose" actually was a term that the ancient Celts had for the Holy Spirit.

The term implies that there is a certain wildness to the Holy Spirit. The dominant images of the Holy Spirit we know most about are a meek dove or a flickering flame of a candle, both of which are in one way accurate.

But the Holy Spirit is much more than that. God's Spirit is power and at times can be like a raging wind. And that kind of power can make us nervous.

We like the idea of the Holy Spirit as a flame on a candle but a raging fire often causes anxiety. Our first instinct is to get it under control.

But anyone who has tried to chase one of these quick aquatic fowl can tell you; they're very hard to control.

In the 19th Chapter of Acts, St Paul meets a group of disciples who "have never heard of the Holy Spirit". And maybe the same can be said about us. Sure, we've heard about the Holy Spirit, but our experience of the Holy Spirit is very limited. The idea of God wanting us to encounter the Holy Spirit, to have a relationship with the Holy Spirit is a foreign concept for many people.

The Wild Goose Project is a simple attempt to invite Catholic Christians into a more profound life giving relationship with the Holy Spirit. This program will show us that the Holy Spirit is not merely something relegated to Confirmation but the Spirit

desires a relationship with us that will take us on a journey to the very Heart of God. The Holy Spirit desires to be present to us in a manner that brings light out of darkness, freedom out of bondage, order out of chaos and life out of death.

The Wild Goose sessions will begin on January 19<sup>th</sup> at the Family Life Center.

*The Great Adventure* Catholic Bible study program, which begins on February 7 is going to basically be our Lenten offering this year.

This wonderful biblical course is designed in such a way that anyone can make sense of the Bible and experience the life-changing power of God's Word. It is designed to help us find new meaning in our lives through a new and profound understanding of God's Word that can transform our lives and bring us closer to Christ.

The Bible needs to be at the Heart of Our Faith and our relationship with God. Scripture informs our beliefs and inspires our devotions. It is the living Word of God, where our Father meets with us and speaks to us and brings us closer to His Son.

But understanding the Bible is not always easy.

Many people have tried time and again to prayerfully read Scripture, but they get frustrated because no one has taken the time to show them how to read the Bible.

*The Great Adventure* will help us to understand that the key to understanding the Bible is finding the story that ties it all together. The Great Adventure Bible Timeline makes the complex simple by helping us to uncover the story woven through Scripture, so that we can make sense of it.

And this program does so by the focusing on 14 narrative books that tell the story of Scripture from beginning to end

It divides that Story into 12 time periods, like chapters in Salvation History.

And finally, *The Great Adventure* ties all of Scripture together by following God's "family plan" from Adam and Eve to Christ and the Church.

And finally, in January we will be offering a program some of you may have heard about.

It's Bishop Robert Barron's series called Catholicism. Bishop Barron is a gifted teacher and he created this groundbreaking program as a thematic presentation of what Catholics believe and why, so all adults can come to a deeper understanding of the Catholic Faith.

Not a video lecture, Church history or scripture study. But this engaging and interesting formational program uses the art, architecture, literature, music and all the treasures of the Catholic tradition to illuminate the timeless teachings of the Church.

So, no matter where you may be in your journey of faith, I believe that one of these programs will be a perfect gift that you can give to yourself or a friend or member of your family. What better way to start the New Year than to avail ourselves to one of these wonderful opportunities to grow in our faith, our love for God, and truly become missionary disciples.