

HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT MATTHEW 2016

1. In Nativity scenes Joseph almost seems out of place in the story
 - a. Notice Mary and Jesus, shepherds, wise men
 - b. Why do we need Joseph since not actual father of Jesus
2. Matthew emphasizes that Joseph is a righteous man betrothed to Mary
 - a. Betrothal was the first step of marriage in Jewish culture
 - i. They are committed to each other but not yet living with each other
 - ii. If one of the partners died then, the other would have been considered a widow or widower
 - iii. To break up the potential marriage the man had to issue a writ of divorce
 - b. Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant and he is not the father
 - i. imagine how strange Mary's explanation would have sounded
 - ii. an angel appeared to her and told her she is going to be the mother of the Savior
 - iii. this will happen not through natural human way but through the power of God
 - c. Since he is not the father, Joseph is obligated by the law to denounce Mary as an adulteress
 - i. sympathetic to her he decides instead to divorce her quietly, hoping real father would step up
 - ii. Courageous because he would be looking like the bad guy to outsiders
 - iii. The public would assume that he had gotten Mary pregnant and then had abandoned her
 - iv. Only he and Mary would know that he was following the law
3. but an angel appears in a dream
 - a. Tells him to take Mary into his home because she had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
 - b. He is to name the child Jesus because he will save people from their sins
 - c. This child will be the fulfillment of the prophecy that a virgin will bear a son and name him Emmanuel (God with us)
 - d. Now this is where Joseph's insight and courage really shine
 - e. Consider the dreams that you have had, how they mix realistic images with strange images
 - f. Would we be willing to stake our whole future on a dream
4. That is what Joseph does, he chooses to believe the words of the angel and takes Mary into his home

- a. As we recall from the story as a result of following this dream, Joseph along with Mary and Jesus had to flee from Herod and live as refugees in Egypt
5. Joseph serves as a good example for us as we try to live a righteous life
 - a. Like Joseph we want to do the right thing, to obey God and follow His will
 - b. As Pope Francis emphasized during the past year of mercy, mercy is the better side of justice
 - c. Even as a righteous man, Joseph works to protect Mary as much as possible, especially when the angel intervenes in his dream
 6. Example of Joseph is a challenge to us
 - a. Our pride feels good when we can look down on other sinners and condemn them
 - b. We can pride ourselves as being holy people, and criticize others often in form of gossip
 - c. See Joseph doing as much as possible to avoid worst punishment for Mary
 - i. God surprises him that this child is to be Son of God
 - d. In same way if someone is in danger because of some wrong they have done
 - e. We will do best to be as merciful and forgiving as possible
 - f. Perhaps God may reward us with revelation, that much greater good may come from appearance of evil
 - g. the great mystery of God, His justice does not condemn, it is a healing mercy
 - h. so we should imitate God, rather than condemn others, can we offer protection and mercy to the helpless like Joseph did for Mary and Jesus.