

HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT MATTHEW

1. Joseph is sort of the forgotten character in the ordinary nativity story
 - a. There is heavy focus on Mary and Jesus
 - b. But Joseph almost seems lost among the shepherds and wise men
2. Matthew emphasizes that Joseph is a righteous man betrothed to Mary
 - i. Betrothal was the first step of marriage in Jewish culture
 1. They are committed to each other but not yet living with each other
 2. If one of the partners died at this time, the other would have been considered a widow or widower
 3. To break up the marriage the husband 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. Because he is not the father, Joseph would have been obligated by the law to divorce Mary and would have had the right to denounce her as an adulteress
 - i. sympathetic to her he decides he would 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. The story gets more interesting, 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 her 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. But every so often some event will come along and it is not clear what the right thing to do is
 - c. Even when there is a law as there was for Joseph that he should divorce Mary, our instincts may tell us that does not seem right either
 - d. Following Joseph's example after doing as much study as we can about our concern, we need to quiet ourselves and pray
 - e. We do this to be open to hearing God speak to us
 - f. If it really as vital as bringing Jesus to the world, he might send an angel in a dream
 - g. More likely it will be through our thoughts and reflections we begin to see the direction the Holy Spirit may be nudging us
 - h. Whenever we consider a decision we need to quietly consider the values we face
 - i. Ultimately the purpose of all we do must be to carry on the work of Jesus, to proclaim that God loves each of his children and we must do the same
 - j. We may never know for sure whether we made the correct decision
 - k. Even Joseph apparently did not live to see the work of Jesus
 - l. God does not demand success from us, He only asks that we do our best to follow his will as best we see it