

Welcome

Advent4 Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Light of the World, you blessed Gabriel to bring to Mary the good news of your coming birth, and blessed Mary as an example of faith to us all. Bless your Church, preparing for Christmas, with the same gift of faith that Mary showed, and prepare us, like her, for your coming as Saviour and Lord. Amen

Song: Lord Jesus Christ, you are one with us © Patrick Appleford

1. Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us, you are one with us, Mary's Son,
Cleansing our hearts from all their sin, pouring your love and goodness in
Jesus, our love for you we sing, living Lord
2. Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us, born as one us, Mary's Son,
Led out to die on Calvary, risen from death to set us free,
Living Lord Jesus, help us see you are Lord
3. Lord Jesus Christ, I would come to you, live my life for you, Son of God!
All your commands I know are true, your many gifts will make me new,
Into my life your pow'r breaks through, living Lord.

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 7: 10-16 (p692)

- 10 *Moreover the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying,*
11 *"Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above."*
12 *But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!"*
13 *Then he said, "Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?"*
14 *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*
15 *"Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.*
16 *"For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.*

New Testament Reading Matthew 1: 18-end (p965)

- 18 *This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.*
19 *Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*
20 *But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*
21 *She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*
22 *All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet:*
23 *"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"— which means, "God with us."*
24 *When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.*
25 *But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

Reflection

One of the hardest, and yet most useful things in life, is to see things from another person's point of view
We're used to reading the Christmas story from Mary's point of view - as recorded in Dr Luke's gospel
It starts with the visit of the angel *Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed (or engaged) to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.* - & we're used to all this,

Also the greeting of the angel Gabriel *"Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you;*
Yet, when Mary saw him, she didn't burst out into song Luke says: she was *troubled (unsettled) wondering what manner of greeting this was.*

We are used to hearing how *the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS*
but for Mary, more questions exploded in this young girl's mind, as she asked: *How can this be?*

We are used to what *the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*

Familiar? Yes, yet this is one of the greatest mysteries of all time

We are used to Mary's final response: *Behold the handmaid/ servant of the Lord. Be it to me as you have said.*

We can be so familiar with all of this that we miss a great deal. However, today's Gospel reading by Matthew helps us to see things from another point of view - to see Mary from Joseph's position

How excited the young couple must have been when they announced their engagement and anticipated the prospect of being together for life in a wonderful marriage relationship.

So, what was Joseph's 'take' on the Annunciation and Incarnation after their engagement?

Matthew writes: *before they came together (socially in a wedding and sexually in marriage) Mary was found to be with child ... through the Holy Spirit.*

How did Joseph react when told by Mary It was 'God's doing' - and talking about angels, didn't help.

Joseph was in a spin as he considered what to do. v19 says *Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly*

That sounds very calm and collected, but in fact, Joseph was in turmoil - his fiancée pregnant! Not by him! He had the right to have Mary stoned for infidelity, yet he wanted to act mercifully. The question raged in his mind as he tossed and turned on his bed, night after night, *as he had considered this - What was he to do?*

The word *considered/thought about* (*enthumeomi* in Greek) is a violent word. It pictures a raging stormy wind; it's about a fight with fierce passion and anger, it can also refer to struggling to breathe, gasping and choking.

I loved the BBC series some years ago written by one of Eastenders team. In it Joseph goes out to his woodwork shed and smashes it, his tools and his trade to pieces. No quiet *Let it be* Scripture says: **after he had considered this** (after going through this storm), *an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. - Joseph, God is involved in this miracle. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

Then the angel reminded Joseph of God's Word and promise through Isaiah some 500yrs beforehand, saying: *All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" - which means, "God with us."*

'Joseph, Mary's child will be no ordinary child - he will be *God in human flesh*; and when you hold this child in your arms in God's house, you'll name Him Jesus; because he is the Saviour of the world, the Sacrifice for sin'

What a promise in this child: God with us, God in us, God cleansing us from sin

So, when Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no sexual union with her until she gave birth to a son; and gave him the name Jesus.

Yes, after the supernatural birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph had sons and daughters together. There was James, Joses (a form of Joseph), Jude and Simon, and at least 3 unnamed sisters that are mentioned in Mark and Matthew's gospels. Jesus had a normal home with younger brothers & sisters (or step ones) YES:

1. Jesus knows what humanity is like! as the African spiritual says: *Jesus knows all about our struggles; He will guide 'til the day is done: There's not a Friend like the lowly Jesus: No, not one! no, not one* - He is Immanuel God with us in humanity.

2. He knows what life is like, and what family life is like. And he knows what a church family can really be like when undergirded by faith and trust!

Does that all sound too wonderful to be true?

When God challenges us with eternal things, in all the mysteries and turmoils of life, let's listen to God and let's be submissive (like Mary) and obedient (like Joseph)

Song: The Virgin Mary had a baby boy *Tradition West Indian Carol*

1. The virgin Mary had a baby boy, the virgin Mary had a baby boy, the virgin Mary had a baby boy, and they say that his name is Jesus

Ref: He come from the glory, He come from the glorious kingdom
He come from the glory, He come from the glorious kingdom
O, yes, believer, O, yes, believer, He come from the glory, He come from the glorious kingdom

2. The angels sang when the baby was born, the angels sang when the baby was born,
The angels sang when the baby was born, and they say that his name is Jesus

Ref: He come from the glory, He come from the glorious kingdom

Prayers Confession and Absolution

-We confess that we have not loved you with all our heart, soul, mind and strength **Lord have mercy**

-We have not loved our neighbour as we love ourselves **Christ have mercy**

-Forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be **Lord have mercy**

May God our Father forgive you by the death of his Son, & strengthen you to live in the power of his Spirit. **Amen**

Father, how we praise for your faithfulness - that you always keep your word. Thank you for your constant love and mercy seen and given in Jesus the babe, the teacher, and the Saviour who died that we might live.

Thank you that you do not 'choose' as we do - you choose the meek and lowly to lift them up. You are a God of truth and justice, and in the end you will win.

-We pray for the needy in this world, suffering from deprivation and injustice, from conflict and oppression

-We pray for your church to be a light in the darkness, and a signpost in uncertainty; to be a light that leads people not only to the crib of humility but to the cross of sacrifice and Christ's Kingly Throne of power

-We pray for those sick in body, mind and spirit; and for those not only concerned about themselves but for others

-We pray especially for the lonely, homeless, and helpless at this time of Christmas celebration. May the words that we sing ring true for them: Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay close by me for ever and love me I pray

We ask this in the name of Jesus our Saviour and Lord who taught his followers to pray

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen**

Song: O Little town of Bethlehem © Phillips Brooks

1 O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light,
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight
2 How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts, the blessing of his heav'n
No ear may hear his coming; yet in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.
3 O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel

Blessing

May the songs of the angels, the light of the star, and the footsteps of the shepherds and kings, lead us to the joy and peace of your presence this day and every day And
The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and all those you love, this day and for ever more **Amen**

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