

HOMILY 4TH SUNDAY ADVENT

December 21, 2025

I was reading a story about a church nativity pageant, not at St. Edith, in which the boy who was to play Joseph got sick at the last minute so they had the pageant without Joseph and nobody noticed. I think Joseph is frequently overlooked. He is mentioned very few times in the Bible, and he is never mentioned after Jesus begins his public ministry. Joseph never speaks in the Bible. Mary has been part of all of the Eucharistic prayers for many years, but Joseph was just added a few years ago by Pope Francis. However, Joseph played a very important role in salvation history. Joseph made a commitment to God and to Mary and he kept that commitment even when it was not easy.

In the gospel reading, we hear about Joseph receiving a message from the angel. At the time Mary and Joseph were betrothed but not yet living together. It was at the time of the betrothal that the commitment was made. If the man did not follow through with the marriage, they would have to write a bill of divorce. Mary was with child before they lived together so according to the culture at that time, Mary could be stoned to death or Joseph could divorce her quietly. Those were his two options. Following through with the marriage was not one of them. Joseph followed through with his commitment to Mary anyway.

Let's talk about the message that he got from the angel. It came in a dream. Now I think we can still get messages from God in a dream, it is all through Sacred Scripture, but accepting the messages we get from God in dreams is not always easy. The message told him that Mary was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Something that has never happened before and has never happened since. The message was telling him to do something that was totally against what his culture was telling him to do. What would you have done in this situation? Would it be easy to

accept that this was a message from God? I think Joseph had made his commitment to Mary and he accepted that this was a message from God and followed through with his commitment. Not an easy thing to do. And after Jesus was born, Herod was having all of the babies born in Bethlehem killed in an attempt to kill Jesus. Joseph fled to Egypt with Mary and Jesus where they hid out for 3-4 years when it was safe for them to return home to Nazareth. That could not have been easy, but if he had not done that Jesus may have been killed. Joseph followed through with his commitments to God and Mary even when it was very hard. He is a great example to us.

Today, on this Fourth Sunday of Advent, with the great example we have received from Joseph, it is a good time to recommit to being a follower of Jesus Christ. In our culture we do not like to commit. We like to keep our options open. Our character is defined by our commitments. We find purpose and meaning in our lives by our commitments, not by the number of options we keep open. Do you discern God's will on a regular basis or do you only do that with the big decisions or when your plan does not work out? We usually do not hear God's voice. But he does communicate with us in more quiet and subtle ways. We need to have quiet time to receive these messages. Do you pray on a regular basis? That is an important way to establish a relationship with God. Do you just pray when you or someone you love is in trouble? Do you come to Mass regularly or is that one hour per week frequently too much to give God? Do you treat all of the people you meet every day as Jesus would treat them? During Advent we have been asking Jesus to bring us together. Are you doing what you can to break down those barriers in your life? It is hard to be a follower of Jesus Christ. I do not think any of us, including myself, do a perfect job, but today is a good time to renew our commitment to being a follower of Jesus Christ. Where do you need to improve? Where do you need to make a commitment?