

2025_12_21 Homily
Fourth Sunday of Advent

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/122125.cfm>

Matthew opens his Gospel with an angel telling Joseph that Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and that he is to take Mary and the child with him. Mary has accepted to be the mother of a God who becomes flesh and wants to be born, carried, and fed by Mary. God becomes human in the most elemental, vulnerable way, to share our biological limits and our spiritual challenges. Joseph is confused, broken, and fearful. He gets caught between obedience to the official law and God's love, between honor and shame. God's salvation unfolds not just in Mary's womb, but in the messiness of human relationships: It arrives with embarrassment, confusion, and the risk of abandonment. God doesn't avoid this confusion; God enters it. Christ is not born in a world cleaned up and ready. He is born into the mess. Jesus comes where He is most needed, not where He is most welcome. Joseph remains in silence, and God shares with him God's dream: That all humanity may be embraced and loved and saved by the human arms of His Divine Son.

Only with Mary and Jesus, Joseph will become the person he is meant to be. Joseph doesn't understand; he doesn't ask for proof; he only trusts the Word of God that has been spoken to him. Joseph's unconditional faith allows God's plan to be accomplished. When we stop trying to control everything, God performs his wonders among us. So, Joseph receives Mary and Jesus, and accepts the challenge to create a family with them. He knows that he is not choosing a life of comfort and world success, or a life of material prosperity and popularity. Rather, he chooses to welcome a Savior who comes to him in a very unexpected way, with all the ups and downs, sufferings, and joy that it requires. This is a beautiful example for us all: We must open our hearts to welcome Jesus Christ, who comes to us in unexpected ways, choosing not what society or the majorities, or even ourselves, consider the best, but choosing what makes us the people we are meant to be.

There is a great deal that we need to learn from St. Joseph. So many times we invoke the law of the land rather than consider how God is calling us to behave. We rush to sue someone who has offended us instead of considering how we can settle the situation in a Christ-like way. We hide behind the law as we tear apart families. Our laws don't always reflect the law of God's kingdom. St. Joseph is teaching us today

what Jesus also came to teach us all: The center of the law is love of God and love of neighbor. We are to honor the law and honor the person who, in our limited understanding, has broken it. And this requires making law the work of love. If we hold onto love, we will see how the law can reflect God's love. If we lose love, we will use the law simply to promote ourselves and punish others. Joseph could follow the official law and prescriptions, and have Mary accused of adultery. But in his love for Mary, Joseph chose mercy, compassion, and kindness, and he decided to divorce her quietly.

We may tend to think that our justice is the only way to resolve all our problems. Joseph is a righteous man who knows that justice is important, but God prefers the ways of mercy. This may sound unreasonable to us. But if we accept God's calling to mercy, we will be the people we are meant to be, the Church will be what she is meant to be, and this nation will be what it truly is meant to be.

St. Joseph chose to love Mary and to forget about the official laws and regulations. What about you and me? Do we condemn people for their sexual orientation – or love them as our own? Do we embrace the divorced with kindness and care for them? Do we look down on the poor - or see in them our brothers and sisters who are struggling? Do we hide behind laws and fail to recognize that undocumented immigrants and aliens are Christ in our midst? Is Jesus and His teaching a scandal we should reject - or a manifestation of the Spirit we need to welcome and embrace?

May the silence of Joseph inspire us to allow God to speak in our hearts, so that we can be the people we are truly meant to be.

The Universal Prayer
Sunday 21st December 2025
Fourth Sunday of Advent

Celebrant:

Reflecting on Joseph's hearing of the conception of Jesus, we imitate his wonder and acceptance of the will of God and the love which bound him to his wife, Mary.

1. May Pope Leo, living the joy of hope, lead all Christians to the wonder of Christmas.
We pray to the Lord.

2. May every Christian follow Mary and Joseph's example and pray to God in the varied circumstances of life, accepting the mystery of God's will.

We pray to the Lord.

3. May there be peace for the people of Bethlehem and throughout the Holy Land, that the present hatred driving people to violence will be dissolved through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

We pray to the Lord.

4. May those who do not have the freedom of religion to celebrate Christmas like we do, not be forgotten, but be held in our hearts and prayers.

We pray to the Lord.

5. May those who are traumatized by the war between Ukraine and Russia, children kidnapped in Nigeria and people starving in Sudan, receive all the support which they need.

We pray to the Lord.

6. May the Diocese of Raleigh and the Daughters of St. Mary of Guadalupe, experience and increase in vocations to the priesthood and to religious life.

We pray to the Lord.

7. May our deceased relatives and friends, as well as all who have died in war and through natural disasters behold the glory of Jesus.

We pray to the Lord.

Celebrant:

Heavenly Father, the earth and its fulness, and all people of every language belong to you. Renew the grace of all creation through your Son, Jesus, who is Lord, forever and ever.