

# Advent HERITAGE



Fourth SUNDAY OF ADVENT



# THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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*"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."*

*When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife.*

— Matthew 1:20-21, 24

The Gospels do not relate a single word of Joseph, the husband of Mary. He is a silent, loving figure standing in the shadows during the season of Advent, coming into view only in the final days of this season of watching and waiting.

Although our Catholic Tradition has often referred to Joseph as the "just" or "righteous man" (cf. Matthew 1:19), the story related in the Gospel for this fourth Sunday of Advent presents a different facet of Joseph's character: obedience.

Taken from the Latin words *ob* and *audire*, our English word "obedience" means *to listen* or *to hear*. But this

sense of listening doesn't mean that we simply take in and then follow the commands of another person. Obedience like that shown by St. Joseph is a deeper sort of awareness and intentionality. Joseph listened, yes, but he *listened with his heart*. This is the kind of obedience that we Christians are called to in our relationship with God and with one another.

As we have journeyed through the season of Advent, we've heard promises from prophets and priests. We have received admonitions from St. Paul, urging us to be patient and to hope. More than that, Jesus has reminded us that he will come again in judgment and power in the fullness of time to bring about the full realization of the reign of God. These have been days of hope, expectation, waiting, perseverance, and, yes, obedience. Because, like Joseph and Mary who said yes to what was asked of them, God has also been asking something of us in these Advent days.

Ultimately, our Advent journey has been a time of discipleship. We are being asked to trust that God has kept — and continues to keep — the promises made to our spiritual ancestors so many centuries ago. And part of this trust is our awareness of how Christ is present and active among us today.

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## THE JESSE TREE: MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

In almost all versions of the Jesse Tree, we find Jesus in the uppermost branches, representing the fruit which is given to us as nourishment. Immediately below Jesus, however, we find Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

In his own time, God had called the patriarchs and prophets, like Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so many others, to prepare the way for His Son. And in Mary and her child, the promises, hopes, and expectations of God's own people were finally being fulfilled: *"From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days ... He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock"* (Micah 5:2b, 4a).

For centuries, the ark of the covenant was a sign of God's commitment and promise to Israel. The ark was an icon of God's presence, a reminder that God was with the people, accompanying them as they wandered through the desert and fought to claim a home and identity. Mary became the new tabernacle, the new living ark of the covenant, who carried God within her. In Mary, God was now present in a person, in a heart.

In the final days of Advent, Mary teaches us how to receive the Word of God, whose coming we celebrate at Christmas:

*She exhorts us first of all, to humility, so that God can find a space in our heart ... She points out to us the value of silence, which knows how to listen to the song of the Angels and the crying of the Child ... Together with her, we stop before the Nativity scene with intimate wonder, savoring the simple and pure joy that this Child gives to humanity."* ("Angelus," December 21, 2003)

## For Reflection

*How does the faithful and loving obedience of Mary help you understand obedience in a new way?*

*How have you experienced the presence of Christ in these past weeks of Advent?*

*What are your hopes for yourself and for the world as we look toward Christmas?*

## ADVENT INSIGHT

**Q.** Why do we give gifts at Christmas?

**A.** Great events in and of themselves are not tangible. They occur in life but leave no mark behind, nothing that someone could come across and know that something significant occurred. So we mark the event with monuments, holidays, gold watches or plaques, making a meaningful event tangible and memorable.

Gifts at Christmas do the same thing. They mark the occasion of the birth of Jesus, communicating a bit of the joy of the day by allowing us to be both giver and receiver. Gift-giving sets aside the day as special and different. The special foods, customs, decorations, and gifts all help focus our attention on the importance and meaning of the day and at the same time allow us to share personally in its joy and happiness.

In giving gifts, though, we can share in the meaning of Christmas in a significant way. We imitate God in sharing with others. We give a bit of ourselves to others in the gifts we give, just as God gives us the gift of His Son. No wonder we often say that the best gifts are those that come from the heart. Given in love, these presents are wrapped in the best covering of all.





# Weekly ADVENT ENCOUNTER

As we learn about the family tree of Jesus, here are some ways to research your own.

## CONNECT

So many milestones happen in churches. Marriages, baptisms, funerals — there is a lot to be said about the parish that people choose to celebrate a sacrament in. Make a list of various parishes near you that are of significance, and make a plan to visit each one.

## EXPLORE

Your relatives will likely have important resources in their homes that can assist your search. Family Bibles, letters, certifications, and other important materials might be only a phone call away. Spend an afternoon making some calls.

## SHARE

If a genealogy chart isn't your thing, consider spending time writing out your family history in story form. Think of funny or interesting stories, or even just straight facts that can be shared across generations.

## Prayer

*Lord Jesus, the time for fulfillment is close at hand.  
As we look to the rising sun,  
which scatters the darkness,  
fill us with the same joyful expectation  
that inspired generations of saints and sages.  
As we watch and wait with your Holy Mother,  
may we find joy in your glorious birth.  
We ask this in your holy name.  
Amen.*

