

Uh oh, Christmas is in just one week! All the cards haven't been sent yet, and the tree still has to be decorated, and there are more presents that have to be wrapped, and more cookies have to be baked! Run to the stores one last time; it's getting late for Amazon to deliver on time! Traffic, traffic, shopping, shopping, wrapping, wrapping, cooking, cooking!! *It's crunch time!!!!*

But wait. Let's take a breath. Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent. And you remember that Advent means coming. Christmas sure is coming. Fast. But besides all that stuff I just panicked about, *Jesus* is coming on Christmas. Is He coming for dinner? Does He like chocolate chip or oatmeal cookies? Is He going to sing Christmas carols with us? Did you wrap His Christmas present yet? Will Santa be bringing Him any presents? Why not? Was He naughty this year?

You see, it's a little silly to be talking about Jesus like he's part of the Christmas rush. But how do we have Christmas *without* Jesus? Isn't He the reason Christmas started in the first place? Now I get it that all of this Christmas stuff can be good. Because when you send a Christmas card or bake cookies or make dinner or buy a present, you do these things for someone else. We call that giving. And Jesus is all about giving. But is the hour we spend in Church on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day the only way He gets really included in our Christmas activities? How can we bring Jesus back into *His* birthday celebration? How can we bring Jesus back into Christmas? Well, how about when your brother or sister gets a present *you* wanted? Do you feel happy for him or her, or are you jealous because you didn't get that present? Is that bringing Jesus into Christmas? Or how about if you take the last roll at dinner without asking if anyone else wants it? Is that bringing Jesus into Christmas? Alright, well then, how about this? How about saying a prayer thanking God for bringing Jesus into the world for *us*? Is *that* bringing Jesus into Christmas? How about just thinking about that first Christmas and all the details. There was no egg nog. There were no Christmas decorations. Charlie Brown and Rudolph weren't on television or on your phone or computer. There were just a lot of hardships that the holy family had to

go through before and after Jesus was born. Doesn't thinking about that first Noel bring Jesus into Christmas? So, don't forget Jesus at Christmas.

What about today's readings? The first reading today comes from Isaiah for the fourth week in a row. Isaiah is our Advent prophet, inspired by God to tell people about the word of God and His plans for the future. Remember how we read about beating swords and spears into plows and pruning hooks? Remember how we read about the wolf and the lamb together, and the leopard and the baby goat, and the calf and the lion? And remember how last week we were told that the eyes of the blind would be opened, the ears of the deaf would be cleared, and the lame would leap like a deer? Well, those readings all come from the Prophet Isaiah, as does today's reading.

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah (**Isaiah 7:10-14**)

Again the Lord spoke to king Ahaz through Isaiah: Ask for a sign from the Lord, your God. That sign will be a very important one. ¶ But Ahaz answered, "I will not ask! I will not bother the Lord.!" ¶ Then Isaiah said, "Listen, you king from the house of David. It is not enough that you bother the humans in your kingdom. Must you waste God's time also? ¶ Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign; the young woman will have a Son and will name Him Emmanuel." ¶ The word of the Lord.

So today's reading concerns Ahaz, the king of Judah and a descendent of King David. He and his people were frightened that they were going to be attacked by their enemies. Isaiah told the king to look for a sign from God and to place his trust in Him. But Ahaz did not follow Isaiah's recommendation. So Isaiah went ahead anyway and *told* him the sign God would give him. Isaiah said, "the young woman will have a Son and will name Him Emmanuel."

Isaiah was talking about Mary and Jesus, of course. Isaiah just foretold the birth of Jesus. Emmanuel means God is with us. So Isaiah said, nearly 750 years before Jesus was born, that God would be with us, that a virgin would have a son named Emmanuel. How did he know that? He

was inspired by God. God let him know; Isaiah was a prophet. God selected him to tell the people about God and what He had planned for the future.

And now Psalm 24, today's Responsorial Psalm (**Psalm 24:1-2,3-4abc**)

(7c & 10b) Let the Lord enter; He is King of glory.

*Let the Lord enter; He is King of glory.*

The earth and everything on it belong to the Lord. The world and its people belong to Him. The Lord placed it all on the oceans and rivers.

*Let the Lord enter; He is King of glory.*

Who may climb the Lord's hill or stand in His holy temple? Only those who do right for the right reason, and don't worship idols.

*Let the Lord enter; He is King of glory.*

The second reading comes, as it so often does, from St. Paul. Remember that St. Paul was the apostle Jesus picked when He knocked him off his horse while he was on his way to persecute more Christians.

A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans (**Romans 1:2-4**)

Sisters and Brothers: Long ago God promised the good news by what the prophets said in the holy Scriptures. The good news is about His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ! As a human, He was from the family of David. But the holy Spirit proved that Jesus is the powerful Son of God, because He was raised from the dead. ¶ The Word of the Lord.

Paul tells us about how God promised us good news through the prophets, just like we've been saying all along about Isaiah. The good news, of course, is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. What Paul is

doing is *proudly* expressing his faith as a Christian. He focuses our attention on both the birth of Jesus here on earth and His rule forever in heaven.

After the second reading comes the gospel, preceded by the gospel acclamation.

*Alleluia, Alleluia. Alleluia, Alleluia.*

A virgin shall give birth to a son; His name shall be Emmanuel: God is with us.

*Alleluia, Alleluia.*

+ A reading from the holy gospel according to St. Matthew (**Mt 1:18-24**)

This is how Jesus Christ was born. A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph from King David's family. But before they were married, she learned that she was going to have a baby by God's Holy Spirit. ¶ Joseph was a good man and did not want to embarrass Mary in front of everyone. So he decided to quietly call off the wedding. ¶ While Joseph was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, the baby that Mary will have is from the Holy Spirit. Go ahead and marry her. Then, after the baby is born, name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." ¶ So God's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, "A virgin will have a baby boy, and He will be called Immanuel," which means, "God is with us." ¶ After Joseph woke up from the dream, he and Mary were soon married, just as the Lord's angel had told him to do. ¶ The gospel of the Lord.

Isn't today's gospel special? It is the beginning of the story of how Jesus came to be born. All that is missing is the manger, the shepherds, and the wise men. We all know that part of the story comes in a few days.

So in the gospel Matthew tells us that Joseph came from King David's family. And Joseph was going to marry Mary until he found out that she

was going to have a baby; she was with child. So Joseph decided to call off the wedding. But then he received a message from an angel in a dream. The angel told Joseph that the baby was from God by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was told to call the baby Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins. You want to bring Jesus back into Christmas? Just think about the events of today's gospel. Like we've been saying, there's no line to see Santa. There's no sale at the toy store. There's no chocolate chip cookies. There's just the preparation for the birth of Jesus.

In the first reading, Isaiah tells us about the future coming of Emmanuel. In the second reading Paul tells us again about what the prophets had said about Jesus. And in the gospel Matthew tells us the *story*, actually quoting the reading from the prophet Isaiah, "The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall name Him Emmanuel." So Isaiah *told* us that Jesus would be coming, and both Paul and Matthew *told* us that Isaiah *told* us that Jesus would be coming, and sure enough (spoiler alert), Jesus came.

And that, girls and boys, is the lesson in *today's* readings.

We celebrate His birth every year on Christmas, and we spend Advent getting ready spiritually for His coming, on Christmas, and at the end of time, and everyday into our lives, if we let Him come. Think about Jesus. Let Him come during Advent. Let Him come on Christmas day. Let Him come *every day*. Think about Jesus!

And *that*, girls and boys, is the lesson of *all* of Advent. Speak about it with your parents. Think about Jesus!

Fourth Sunday of Advent, 2022  
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