

December 18, 2022

Written by
THE
FAITHFUL
DISCIPLE

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Is 7:10-14 | Rom 1:1-7 | Mt 1:18-24

GROW AS A DISCIPLE | PRAY, STUDY, ENGAGE, SERVE

In our family's department-store Nativity set, Joseph blends into the background: Mary and the infant Jesus steal the scene, she in her blue robes and looking over the sweet, tiny and vulnerable Son of God. Even the Magi stand out more than humble Joseph. Yet today's Gospel focuses on Jesus' earthly father, whom many of us Catholics grew to know a little better during the Year of St. Joseph in 2021. Imagine Joseph's shock at learning Mary was pregnant! Rather than quietly divorcing her, he accepts the angel's words at face value: "For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Joseph takes Mary into his home and embraces her and the child Jesus she bears. As we celebrate this fourth Sunday of Advent, we can all do well to follow Joseph and Mary's example by saying "yes" to God, even though it may turn our lives upside down. We can dust off our Nativity scenes and ask the Lord to help us prepare our hearts and homes for Jesus.

GO EVANGELIZE

PRAYER, INVITATION, WITNESS, ACCOMPANIMENT

I remember our first trip to the pediatrician with our newborn. Our job as parents, he said in so many words, was to raise him so that he'd be ready to leave us at 18. As our youngest approaches that milestone, I'm having a hard time letting go. In his apostolic letter *Patris Corde*, Pope Francis holds up St. Joseph as an example of what it means to be a father (and I think this applies to mothers, too): "Every child is the bearer of a unique mystery that can only be brought to light with the help of a father who respects that child's freedom. A father who realizes that he is most a father and educator at the point when he becomes 'useless,' when he sees that his child has become independent and can walk the paths of life unaccompanied. When he becomes like Joseph, who always knew that his child was not his own but had merely been entrusted to his care." Joseph and Mary loved Jesus in this way, accepting that Jesus did not "belong" to them but to all of us. Whether or not we are parents, we can learn from their example, entrusting our lives and those of our loved ones to God. As St. Paul reminds us, we "belong to Jesus Christ."

ACTION "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" As you light the Advent candles or say evening prayers this week, reflect on the ways Jesus has made his presence known to you today and give thanks.

