

December 18, 2022 – Fourth Sunday of Advent
Looking at the New Born Babe, Accept our Life Realities
Gospel of Matthew 1:18-24
Fr. Oliver

It was a few days before Christmas. A woman woke up one morning and told her husband, "I just dreamed that you gave me a pearl necklace for Christmas. What do you think this dream means?" "Oh," her husband replied, "you'll know the day after tomorrow." The next morning, she turned to her husband again and said she had the same dream and received the same reply. On the third morning, the woman woke up and smiled at her husband, "I just dreamed again that you gave me a pearl necklace for Christmas. What do you think this dream means?" And he smiled back, "You'll know tonight." That evening, the man came home with a small package and presented it to his wife. She was delighted. She opened it gently. And when she did, she found—a book! And the book's title was *The Meaning of Dreams*. — Today's Gospel tells us how Joseph had a dream and how he reacted to it.

The story of the Virgin Birth is at the heart of our Christmas celebrations. Hence, today's readings focus on the story of the Virgin Birth. In the first reading, God gives a sign through the prophet Isaiah to King Ahaz of Judah: "*Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel*" (Is 7:14). Matthew considers this one of the most descriptive and definite prophecies foretelling that the future Messianic king, the Christ, would be born as a descendant of David. Then Paul provides a sweeping summary of God's mighty acts in history through Jesus Christ. Today's Gospel, from Matthew, focuses on the person and role of Joseph. In order for Jesus to fulfil the Messianic prophecy given by Isaiah, Joseph had to, and freely, willingly, did, accept Jesus as his son, making Jesus a descendant of David because Joseph was a descendant of David. Hence, Matthew makes it clear that Jesus was not the biological child of Joseph. But because Joseph was the husband of Mary at the time Jesus was born, and because he named and thus formally accepted the child as his own, Jesus was legally the son of Joseph and thus a descendant of David.

A Jesuit, a Dominican, and a Franciscan were walking along an old road, debating the greatness of their orders. Suddenly, a vision of the Holy Family appeared in front of them, with Jesus in a manger and Mary and Joseph praying over him. The Franciscan fell on his face, overcome with awe at the sight of God born in such poverty. The Dominican fell to his knees, adoring the beautiful reflection of the Trinity and the Holy Family. The Jesuit walked up to Joseph, put his arm around his shoulder, and said, "So, where are you thinking of sending the kid for school?" So let us ponder on some of the life messages.

1) Like Joseph, we need to trust in God, listen to Him and be faithful. We are here in this Church, one week before Christmas, because, like Joseph, we are faithful, and we trust in God, His power and His mercy. Although we may face financial problems, job insecurity, family problems, and health concerns let us try to be trusting and faithful like St. Joseph. Let us remain faithful and prayerful, imitating Joseph and Mary, the humblest of the humble, the kindest of the kindly, and the greatest-ever believers in God's goodness and mercy, as we welcome Jesus into our hearts and lives this Christmas.

2) We need to experience **Emmanuel** in our lives and change the world: God who entered our world through Jesus some 2000 years ago *is* at work in the world. But the question is, if God has come to be present in our lives and our world, then why are there so many lives which are unhappy and beastly? Why are people so hostile, hating each other, and why do so many love-relationships turn sour? Why is there domestic violence? Why is there child abuse? Why is there war in at least a dozen countries of God's good earth at any given time? Why are so many people homeless and hungry, even in rich countries like ours? Let us take some time to let the Christ Child enter our hearts and lives this week, so that He may change our world of miseries with the beauty of that love.

3) Do we have any gift for our "Birthday Boy"? Let us check to see if Jesus is on *our* list this Christmas and if we have a special gift in mind for him. We all know the pleasure of finding the right present for our husband or wife, for our children, a good friend, or a parent. What special gift are we giving to Jesus this year to honour his birth, and what do we expect from God? God sent Jesus from Heaven to earth to give us human beings what we really need most in life: hearts filled with love. God wants to give each of us a heart filled with love, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness on this Christmas Day, and on every day of our lives.

4) Let us be a Christmas gift to others: The greatest gift we can give to those we love, is to have faith in them, believe in their dreams, and try to help them realize them. We need to believe in the dreams of our husband, wife, children, parents, heroes, leaders, and friends. Then, try our best to help them realize those dreams.