

Fourth Sunday of Advent Reflection by Sr. Barb McMullen, CDP



Signs and promises, hopes and dreams scatter across our Advent readings for this fourth and last Sunday before the feast of Christmas. Dreams can be very powerful messengers in our life. Parents dream all kinds of dreams for their children—from simply doing well in school, growing up happy, being healthy - to their child even becoming president one day, or playing on a World Series team that waited 108 years for that prize.

Dreams bring hope and expectation, potential and possibility. It was no less for Mary and Joseph. Their journeys both begin with angelic appearances which give them a seemingly impossible mission—Mary is told she is to bear a son through the power of the Holy Spirit and Joseph, in a dream, is told not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, for the child she bears is holy, is God's own Son. Each of them listens to the angelic message and trusts the dream.

Usually Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Mary dominate the Advent readings. But in this fourth Sunday the gospel writer, Matthew, builds the story around Joseph. We get a glimpse into the personal character of Joseph, the man. He has a dream where God explains the mystery around Mary's pregnancy and tells Joseph that he is to be the husband of Mary and foster father to Jesus. Joseph listens. Joseph takes Mary into his home and provides the care and protection needed. He places himself at the disposal of God and puts his trust completely in God. Because Mary and Joseph put their total trust in divine providence, God's redemptive plan for humankind is put into place.

Messages and messengers come in many forms. Are we open to them? Are our hearts disposed to hear God's voice? We can all learn from Mary and Joseph's example to listen to those messages from God. We can learn not to presume, not to trespass carelessly on the sacred ground of our dreams.

In this fourth Sunday of Advent we prepare ourselves once again for the great gift of Emmanuel, God with us—the One for whom we deeply long—the One who has come, is here, and will come again. God is indeed in our midst. Emmanuel, the One whose presence with us allows us and encourages us to live the Gospel in our daily lives, is here, NOW. He calls us to be open to the signs, promises, and dreams that God has for us and for our world. Let Christ be re-born in each of us this Christmas as we make visible the Light of the World and the Prince of Peace in our little corner of the universe.

