

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

YEAR A

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

God, you chose
ordinary people,
common people,
to make a home for Jesus.
We want to make a home
for him in our hearts.
Give us the love to do this,
and let him be our brother,
forever and ever.

FOCUS OF THE READINGS:

Both of our readings for today speak of the intervention of God in human history and call us to trust in the signs that reveal the power of God.

In our first reading, Isaiah speaks of a sign that will assure King Ahaz that God will intervene on his behalf and save Judah from the threat of Syria and Israel. The sign will be the birth of a baby to a young maiden, and the child will be called Emmanuel. While this most probably referred to the birth of the King's son, Hezekiah, and, therefore, the preservation of the Davidic line of kings, Matthew has interpreted it to refer to the birth of Jesus.

In our Gospel for today, we have the Annunciation to Joseph. God reveals the birth of a son to the virgin, Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Like the first reading, the focus is on the saving intervention of God in human history.

REFLECTING ON THE READINGS WITH CHILDREN:

Ask the children what they heard in the Gospel.

FIRST READING: *Isaiah 7:10-14*

This is a reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah said to King Ahaz,

“Ask God to give you a sign
(so you will know what to do.)
Ask anything you wish, large or small.”

But Ahaz answered,

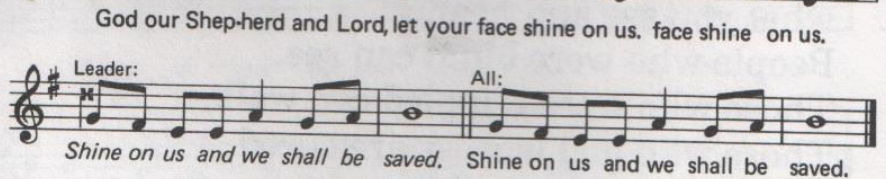
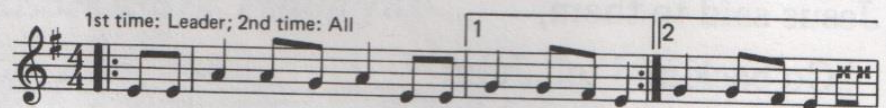
“No, I won't ask for a sign.
I will not tempt God!”

Then Isaiah said to Ahaz,

“Listen, you have already caused problems
for our people;
must you make God tired as well?
But God will give you a sign anyway!
And this is what the sign will be—
A virgin will give birth to a child,
and she will call him Emmanuel.”

The Word of the Lord.

RESPONSE: *Psalm 80*



GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

(clap)

By the pow'r of the Spir - it Ma - ry will give
birth to a Son called Je - sus. By the pow'r of the
Spir - it Em - man - u - el is near!
Al - le - lu - ia, a - le - lu - ia! "Em - man - u - el is near."

*After Gospel, repeat Acclamation from here.

GOSPEL: *Matthew 1:18-24*

This is a reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

This is how the birth of Christ came about.

Mary, his mother,
was engaged to a man called Joseph.
But before they lived together,
they found that she was going to have a child
by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Now Joseph was a good man,
so he decided to break their engagement quietly.
But an angel of God came to Joseph in a dream
and said,

“Joseph, do not be afraid
to take Mary as your wife.
It is by the power of the Holy Spirit
that she is going to have a son.
You are to give him the name Jesus, because
he will save his people from their sins.”

All of this happened so that what God said
through the prophet Isaiah
would be made clear—

“A virgin will give birth to a child,
and she will name him Emmanuel.
This name means, ‘God is with us.’ ”

When Joseph woke up,
he did what the angel of God told him.
He took Mary into his home as his wife.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Caution: because we are accustomed to the Annunciation to Mary in the Gospel of Luke, which we will hear next year, we may overlook here what is truly the Annunciation to Joseph. Help the children see the story as Matthew tells it, from Joseph's point of view.

The Infancy Narratives, which include the Annunciation, birth and infancy of Jesus, were written as a sort of a preface to the entire message of the Gospel. They contain profound theological teachings told in story form with concrete imagery. Because of the many rich and beautiful customs that have developed around these stories, the children retain these concrete images and probably assume that the stories, with all their details, are actual accounts of the birth of Jesus. While it is nearly impossible to keep the children from taking these stories literally, we can help them to discover, at least partially, the deeper meaning intended by the evangelists. Children, as we do, will continue to cherish these images while continuing to grow in a deeper understanding of their meaning for our lives. It seems appropriate to encourage the joy children have in these vivid stories, which do, in fact, create images for them of the love of God expressed in the mystery of the Incarnation.

Dealing with “she conceived a child by the power of the Holy Spirit” is not easy for adults, much less children! What is important here is that the children see that God acts in our lives to be with us, sometimes in a surprising and even startling way. Matthew means to highlight here that Jesus is truly “Emmanuel . . . God with us” and that he is our Savior.

Talk about the two names given to Jesus in this story—Emmanuel and Savior. What do they mean? Ask the children why it is important to have God with us today. Ask the children if they think the world needs a Savior now. Do we, each of us personally, need a Savior? What does Jesus save us from? How can our lives be different because of Jesus? How can we help others to see that God is truly with us, and with them?

