

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT; Cycle – A; Dec. 21<sup>st</sup> 2025**  
**Isaiah 7: 10-14; Romans 1: 1-7; Matthew 1: 18-24**

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Thanks to the great efforts of Matthew and Luke we have almost a full account of the Infancy narrative of Jesus. Apparently both narratives look different for the very reason that they wrote their gospels to two different communities. For instance as a Jew, Matthew aimed at the Jewish converts whereas Luke, as a gentile in origin, concentrated on the gentile community. So they have taken and emphasized the facts which were useful to their respective communities. As a Jew for Matthew, the crisis and anxiety of Joseph are serious matter. Here Matthew totally undermines the same crisis and worries Mary was undergoing. It shows how male dominant the Jewish community was. On the other hand, Luke gives much stress on Mary's concern over the announcement of the angel. In a way we can conclude that Matthew is more Joseph oriented and Luke is Mary oriented. When we read the Infancy narrative, we need to take both books and read side by side. Of course, we appreciate the detailed account of Luke better.

Now let us see the facts which are exclusive to Matthew and that of Luke. Matthew begins his gospel with the long genealogy of Jesus to show that Jesus was the descendent of David through lineage of Joseph. Thus the prophecy about *Jesus that he would be the Son of David was fulfilled*. After briefly mentioning about the annunciation of Mary just in one verse, Matthew goes to elaborate the crisis of Joseph who found his future wife pregnant, which was a very serious moral case. So every Jew is concerned to know how Joseph came out of this crisis. So Matthew narrates the story of the appearance of the angel and his assurance to Joseph. Thereafter the name of Joseph appears couple more times in Matthew. After the birth of Jesus the first outsiders who visited Jesus were the magi, the non-Jews. Then he gives the accounts of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt; the massacre of the innocent children and the return of the Holy Family back to Nazareth. With such brief account Matthew's narration is over.

Whereas Luke begins his gospel with the detailed account of the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah. Then he narrates the annunciation in great details and in a dramatic way. But he just mentions only once the name of Joseph to show that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. **In Luke the canticles of Zechariah and Mary are very famous and they are used in the Church's official prayers.** According to Luke the first visitors to the Holy Family were the shepherds of the area, not the magi. Only Luke gives the account of the circumcision and the presentation of Jesus in the Temple and the appearance of the great Prophet Simeon and Prophetess Anna. His infancy narrative goes up to the loss of Jesus in the Temple at the age of twelve. Luke too gives the genealogy of

Jesus in different order, starting from Joseph and goes back to Adam; whereas Matthew begins with Abraham and comes down to Joseph.

As we have the picture of Joseph in today's gospel, it is good to know a little bit about the great character of Joseph. When we see Joseph in the gospel, though only shortly, we see how great was his patience and compassion for Mary. Also his trust in the words of the angel is amazing. When Joseph heard about the pregnancy of Mary, he was shaken. He could have handed Mary to the Jewish Sanhedrin and escape. But he didn't want to be that cruel to her. For Matthew says, **"Joseph was a righteous man."** So he decided to leave her quietly. Here comes the interference of the angel, but only in his dream and Joseph was asked to accept Mary immediately. It is interesting to notice that the angel appeared to Joseph two more times **but only in the dream**. Both Zechariah and Mary had the privilege to see the angel directly. But in all three situations Joseph believed what he saw in the dream and heard. None of us will venture to act on the dream we have. Zechariah totally doubted the words of the angel and Mary had hesitation and concerns. **But Joseph never questioned or doubted the angel's words.**

Joseph is a good role model for all the Christians. In our journey of faith there are moments of crisis and doubts. Perhaps, we had the moments when we felt like leaving our faith and going away. Very often we seek some signs from God and He doesn't even send us an angel in our dream. But His assurance of help is always with us. To Joseph the angel said, **"Joseph do not be afraid to take Mary your wife in to your home."** To Mary also the angel says, **"Do not be afraid."** **This phrase 'Do not be afraid' or 'Fear not' occurs 365 times in the entire Bible.** On a few occasions Jesus uses the same phrase to comfort and strengthen his apostles, *"Do not be afraid, it is I."* When we think that we can no more handle the situations, the words of Jesus come to us, **'Do not be afraid I am with you.'** *Of course, they may not be coming through angel Gabriel or Raphael, rather they may be coming through our friends, neighbors, family members and priests and they will be the angels who help us at times.* In order to recognize this comforting voice we need the humility, faith and trust in the Lord. Joseph never doubted the words of the angel even for a moment; as a result he became righteous before God. Let this phrase, **'Do not be afraid,'** always ring in our ears.