

Living the Word

MEDITATING ON THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

Fourth Sunday of Advent.

A resource for personal, family and community prayer.



“do not be afraid..”

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-24

¹⁸This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. ²⁰He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the

You are invited to read the Gospel passage attentively, respectfully and reverently as a gift of God.



one to save his people from their sins.”

²²Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:
²³“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel, a name which means God is with us.”

²⁴When Joseph woke he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Reading

Matthew's main focus in this Gospel is on Joseph. On discovering that Mary is pregnant, he feels let down, betrayed, and confused. Being a man of honour and not wanting to embarrass or shame her, he decides to divorce her informally. With the help and reassurance of the angel, he works through his doubts and fears and comes to a place of acceptance.

"He took his wife to his home" - accepts responsibility for Mary and her child and agrees to name him 'Jesus'. In doing so he is committed to help him to live up to his name - "the one who is to save his people from their sins".

Recognising

You are invited to meditate on the passage, or any part of it, by letting it speak to your life experience until you feel to say "I recognise this passage."

v19. "Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally."

Can you enter into the experience of Joseph by remembering an unexpected turn of events in a relationship where you felt let down? It made you question your commitment because of the new demands and challenges that it would make on you.

v20. "Don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife" Can you remember an experience of being faced with a daunting situation that left you looking for a way out, but, thanks to the wisdom and encouragement from some "angel" in your life, you set aside your doubts and embraced the challenge?

v21. "She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus"

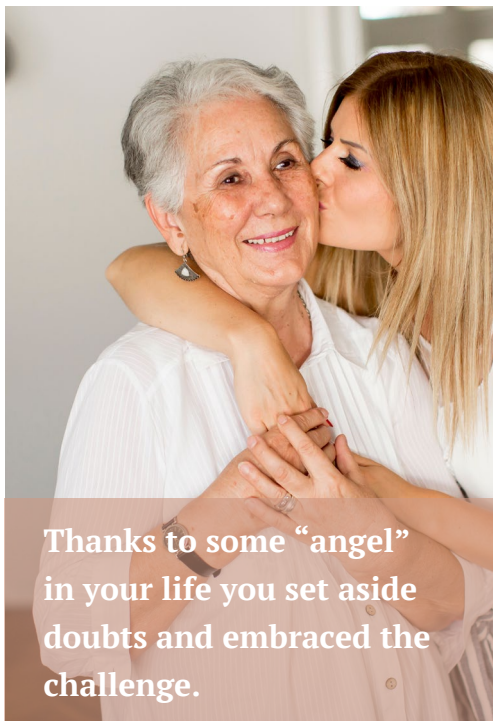
Can you remember putting a lot of care and consideration into naming your "child", or "project", which involved a desire and commitment to see your "child" become all that it could be?



Can you remember an unexpected turn of events in a relationship?

v22. "This took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet"

Can you enter into the experience of Matthew the evangelist by recognizing how events, happenings and encounters in your life are a fulfilment of what is written in the Gospels?



Thanks to some “angel” in your life you set aside doubts and embraced the challenge.

We ask forgiveness for the times when the going got tough and we ran away at the first opportunity - “decided to divorce her informally”. We are sorry for any lack of commitment that may have blocked your coming into our lives and our world.

Help us, Father, in times of doubt and uncertainty to listen to others, “the angels who appear to us”, so that we might better understand the situation at hand, and respond lovingly.

Responding

Having recognised God’s presence in life, you are invited to **respond** in your own words, in prayer (thanksgiving, repentance and petition).

We thank you, Father, for all the “Josephs” of our world who, in spite of their initial inclination to run away from difficult situations, end up accepting it and embracing it- “taking Mary home as his wife”, and, in doing so, have allowed you to come into this world in a new and beautiful way.



Help us, Father, in times of doubt and uncertainty to listen to others, “the angels who appear to us”.

Resting

You are invited to enter deep prayer by simply **resting** your heart in God’s presence (Contemplative moment). The quiet repetition of a word or phrase from the passage might help you on this journey into greater silence and stillness, e.g. “Jesus”.

Reflecting

From your journey with this passage, you are now invited to **reflect**, and put into your own words, any new insights or understanding that you have received (**Wisdom moment**).

From your journey with the passage, what new insight or understanding has been given

to you into the meaning of commitment or fidelity or trust? It might read something like this: **Working together to resolve serious difficulties in a relationship is the hallmark of true commitment.** This is only a sample. Try to uncover and express your own personal insight.



Reading

Joseph is overwhelmed by, and blind to, the plan of God until the angel appears to reassure him. The meeting with the angel fills Joseph with peace and a trust that encourages him to play his part in God's plan. It is a lightbulb moment for Joseph in what seems to have been an experience of darkness.

Recognising

Can you remember a time of uncertainty, shock or change in your life and an 'angel person' reassured you that this experience is part of God's plan, that light will come from darkness?

Can you remember a time when you brought light and peace to another person who was in darkness, and encouraged them to play their part in God's plan?

Responding

Father, I thank you for the many angels who have reminded me not to be afraid and to keep

the faith in your loving plan for my life.

Father, I am sorry for the times that I allowed the fear of events in my life to overwhelm me and prevent me from seeing your guiding light and presence.

Father, I ask that you grant me the strength be 'the angel' in the lives of the people whom I meet, so that they may come to see your light in the darkness of their experiences.

Resting

Rest in the loving embrace of the Father by repeating "DO NOT BE AFRAID" for as long as it is possible. May you be filled with all the joy and peace that comes from resting in the reassuring presence of the Father.

Reflecting

Reassurance will encourage others to lift up their eyes and see the light at the end of the tunnel.

A simple summary of Lectio steps can be found in the porch of the church.