

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

December 18, 2022

ANGELS

encountering the divine

by Drew Downs

Our focus this time of year naturally turns to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. We recall a pastoral vision of Jesus's birth, with shepherd attendants. And, of course, the angels who guide them.

In Matthew's telling, we have several encounters with angels, who advise Joseph and the Wise Men about their future. Inviting them to engage with what God is doing in the world.

Most of us wonder whether we'd receive the angels so well. Or perhaps we assume that we would (we're good, faithful Christians after all)!

There is also something *not* hypothetical about encountering the divine, because it is, after all, all around us. The bigger question is not Would we do what Joseph did in his situation? but Do we do what God calls us to in our present one?

ORDINARY TIME

Autumn 2022

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Racism

We were alarmed by the local story of hate-filled racist actions out of West Vigo High School that were brought to light last week. The extent of the actions, how long they have been going on, and the willingness of school officials to avoid accountability are not yet clear. But it is clear that the amount and character of the actions exceeds even our most pessimistic assumptions about the character of our neighbors.

I, along with many others, attended Monday's school board meeting. Brave members of the community spoke up, not only for the victims of abuse, but to charge our leaders with the responsibility to fix it.

What genuinely surprised me was that there was no prepared statement or public declaration that affirmatively named that racism is, in fact, bad.

While many in our community want to see action, not just words, it is words that often beget action. Words from our leaders and elected officials who are willing to say something as direct as this:

Racism is a scourge on humanity. It is immoral. It is evil. And tolerance of such vile behavior is destructive to human flourishing.

We must be able to say that. To one another. And then, also, act accordingly. Because, in light of abuse happening to our neighbors, friends, and loved ones, *not* saying it is just as political an act as saying it.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

Autumn 2022

FOR SUNDAY

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 18, 2022

Collect

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Matthew 1:18-25

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

Reflection

This week, we're invited briefly into the mind of Joseph. A man who, finding out that his fiancé is pregnant, struggles with figuring out what the right thing to do is.

Perhaps we believe that the answer is obvious. We may be convinced the right thing for a man to do is to marry the woman and protect her.

Or, we may have a conviction toward the sanctity of human life, so there is no question that this baby should be born and he will take appropriate responsibility for all of it.

Underlying both of these ideas is a sense of a *deeper law* at work. Sometimes we refer to this as natural law. That regardless of what society says or even what the church

ORDINARY TIME

teaches, there is a "right thing" that exists outside of these measures. This is a tempting conviction. And one to which I also usually subscribe.

This, however, isn't what Joseph is thinking about. Not *exactly*.

Joseph is weighing what his religious tradition teaches with what he thinks may be right. But there's no way he would think it is *more* right. And further, it is complicated by this divine witness. An angel speaks to him and tells him to break the law.

The law, of course, would have Joseph stone his fiancé himself. Or hand her over to be stoned to death. He was already leaning toward the *slightly* more humane option of sending her back like an overcooked steak.

God's intervention, to preserve Mary and the baby, and to encourage Joseph to participate in this birth, creates a different dynamic than the more *comfortable* territory of what is "right". Joseph was already planning on doing the "right" thing in his context. God was giving him a **new** context.

Through this angel visitation (and others that follow), Joseph is invited into the transformation of the order of things: what constitutes "right," just, and loving. Because God is doing a new thing and making Joseph and Mary instruments of that new thing.

It is important that we can put ourselves in their shoes. Or more importantly, be able to draw into our own material conditions, the humanness of the Holy Family. I think this is essential to our theology.

Let us do so through the lens of *newness* that God is offering them. An invitation to participate in a bigger project that *requires their protection, love, and joy* to complete. A project that we inherit, not naturally through birth, but through the grace of God.

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
215 N. 7TH ST TERRE HAUTE IN 47807
812.232.5165

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG