

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



December 21, 2025

SAVE

the promise, the expectation, the choice

by Drew Downs

When the angel comes to Joseph, he can read the situation. A pregnant fiancée has certain . . . associations. And repercussions. Of course he'd be angry, yes, but mostly scared. So he tells him to chill. Do not fear. God is up to something — and you're going to want to hear this.

The situation is deadly, remember. For everyone. So they're going to have to come up with a plan. Much like families sending

their daughters to special schools after an "accident" or TV shows hiding an actress' "bump" from the audience behind a desk or baggy clothing.

It is fun to speculate, isn't it? But none of this is the point of the story. The angel tells Joseph that this boy, Mary's son, will save the world. And *he* is to name him Jesus. This is his part to play. To be the step-dad. To be responsible. And help the boy change the world.

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

2025

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!

Love and Christmas

The fourth candle in the Advent wreath is for Love.

This is the nature of God and our path to follow. Love is the way we are to be.

It is also the image we have of Christmas, isn't it? Memories of family, gathering by the tree or a fire place, with sumptuous food: chocolate, orange: decadent and celebratory. There is often music and laughter. Presents and play.

Surrounding it all is love. Love, of the sort we're called to practice religiously, constantly, daily.

We remember the moments, the love and compassion, the joy and delight and anticipate their return. In music and liturgy, gathering and quiet nights at home. And we long for their permanence, perpetual and normal. Loving and gifting and celebrating like we used to. Again. Here. Among these people.

This is our joy, our hope, our desire. It is also the foundation of our worship. Join us in the next week, as we gather again for Christmas celebrations:

December 24 @4pm + 8pm
December 25 @10am
December 26 @6pm (in the chapel)
December 28 @10am only

With love,
Drew+

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

2025

FOR SUNDAY

Advent 4A

December 21, 2025

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

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

Reflection

Considering how big a deal the birth of Jesus is to our faith, it is hilarious how low-key it is depicted in the Gospel of Matthew. It is simply something that happens, a dependent clause near the end. In fact, it is written entirely in relationship to Mary, to Joseph's relationship to her, and the consequences of his choosing to remain with her.

He has a dream, follows it, marries Mary, but doesn't sleep with her until she gives birth to Jesus.

There is no small amount of interest in Joseph, particularly as he is given a particular part to play in this telling of the story. Interest that is enhanced by just how much this version is directly about him.

We might choose, as we often do this time of year, to consider the matter of agency — that Joseph and Mary each say yes to the angel's offer (Joseph in Matthew and Mary in Luke) — which provide a way into the wider story for us. They had a choice — and so do we. A choice to let the light of Christ into our hearts and be changed.

The place of change and choice in Christian practice is often treated as the living out of belief, which of course it is, most profoundly in the sacraments. But let us consider it more organically, as a response to relationship — as in our relationship with God. And what defines relationships but the *regular* participation of its members. The choices we make with someone else, or for them; on behalf of them. The choice to love in particular ways, with gifts, kindness, or attention, perhaps.

When we consider faith as an active participatory relationship with God, the example of the choices made by Joseph and Mary reflect the choices we receive on a regular basis to participate in the wider Jesus Event, to accept the burden and joy of loving our neighbors, seem easier. And yet, no less holy.

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