

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2025

St. Edward's Parish

Friends, on this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, the Gospel always turns to the events that immediately lead up to the birth of Jesus. In particular, it focuses on the role of Mary and Joseph in receiving the child Jesus. This year the account comes from the Gospel of Matthew where we see Joseph's struggle to understand what is happening and his courage to take Mary as his wife and become the foster father of Jesus.

In the Gospel we have just read, Joseph does not understand Mary's pregnancy. A common view is that he suspected she had been unfaithful. For that reason, he planned to separate from her quietly so she would not be punished for the infidelity. Alternatively, some have proposed that Joseph knew Mary could never be unfaithful, and he was aware the pregnancy was miraculous. He did not feel worthy to be a part of this great mystery and, out of reverence, resolved to separate quietly from her. We do not know for certain what was in Joseph's mind; however, we do know the decision he made. The angel encouraged him, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife." Similar words, "Do not be afraid" were also said to Mary by the angel. Both Joseph and Mary said "yes" to God and trusted. This "yes" would not be easy: they faced poverty, birth in a stable, attempted murder of their child under Herod's decree, exile in a foreign country. However, their "yes" brought a new life into the world that would change everything.

We can apply the same words "Do not be afraid" to our times. This message of trust and openness to life goes out to all, especially to young people and couples today. Do not be afraid to commit to marriage; do not be afraid to be generous in having children; perhaps we could add do not be afraid to give your life as a priest or religious brother or sister. In our current times, we are surrounded by fear. This is especially true regarding marriage and children. I often speak to young couples who are afraid of being generous in having children; afraid they cannot afford it, afraid they will be too busy, afraid they will have to give up a career or some comforts. Even family members can speak words of fear. I remember being at a gathering several years ago and a young couple was

speaking about their hope to have another child. A family member sarcastically said, “Don’t do it. It will ruin your life.” I was dumbstruck; yet it captures the atmosphere of our times.

The Gospel today reminds us to not be afraid; God will provide. There is nothing more precious than a human life; it has eternal significance. Each child has an eternal soul made by God to be forever in heaven. The sufferings of this life are nothing compared to the value of a child. I think often with gratitude of my own grandparents who raised large families, despite many hardships. If they had not been so generous, I would not exist, neither would my siblings nor their children; perhaps there would be no parish priest here. Every “yes” to a child has untold value and every “no” has echoing consequences.

One of the great tragedies of our times is the loss of generosity in having children. Particularly, the embrace of artificial contraception, has created a society that has lost the spirit of generosity, has lost trust in God, and has become self-centered and very lonely. This is one of the reasons we have so little joy today. Children are seen as burdens rather than blessings. When children are seen this way, it then paves the way for abortion. The Catholic Church had the wisdom to warn us strongly against the dangers of artificial contraception; yet few listened. The Church does recognize that families, for serious reasons, may have to limit or space out the births of children. For that there are acceptable natural means, such as Natural Family Planning, where a couple is attentive to the natural cycles of fertility, and they practice self-control and sacrifice, while always remaining open to new life. This can even make mutual respect and love increase. The disposition for us, however, remains to foster a spirit of generosity in giving life and trusting God will provide.

Mary and Joseph show us the way to trust in God and not be afraid. May they intercede for us, for our society, our families, and especially for all young people today that we may learn the way of generosity, love, and trust once again. If we have lacked generosity and trust, we can always turn back to the Lord with repentance, specially in the sacrament of Reconciliation.