

# Sunday, December 18, 2016

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

### Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

#### Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14

Responsorial: Psalm 24:1-6

2nd Reading: Romans 1:1-7

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-24

### Allowing the Coming of Emmanuel, God with Us, to Change Our Lives

*They shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." (Matthew 1:23)*

"Emmanuel." You can imagine what that name must have meant to Joseph when he awoke from his dream.

First, it must have consoled him. The fact that God was with Mary and him in such a physical way must have been comforting, so much so that he became willing to take Mary as his wife.

Second, it must have given him courage. Humble tradesman that he was, Joseph probably felt unqualified to be the guardian of the Messiah. So the name Emmanuel probably felt like a shield against fear. It gave him the boldness he needed to guard and protect Mary and her child.

Lastly, the name Emmanuel must have filled him with joy. At last! The Messiah that Israel had long awaited! God had come to visit his people in a new and powerful way; he was going to save them from their sins. How could Joseph possibly contain his excitement? God had kept his promise. He was with them!

This dream changed Joseph's outlook on the dilemma that he faced with his betrothal to Mary. Comforted, strengthened, and made joyful by the name Emmanuel, he could now say yes to God's plan for his life and for the unique family he would lead.

This one name—Emmanuel—holds these three treasures for you as well. When you wake up each morning and start thinking about the challenges of the day ahead, remember that God is with you, like a friend you can spend each day with. He is your courage and strength when you feel unqualified to handle a particular situation. He is your joy, reminding you of the promise of heaven.

So hold on to Jesus, God-with-us. Look for signs of his presence in your life. Wrap yourself in his protection. Most of all, rejoice in it! God has sent his Son to you. You have a Savior who is always with you!

*"Emmanuel, I step forth today rejoicing in your faithfulness and in the courage and freedom that you bring to my life."*

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***Questions for Reflection or Discussion:***

1. In the first reading, Ahaz' weak response to the Lord speaking to him reminds us that we too can take for granted the wonderful revelation of God's love for us that we have in the coming of Jesus.
  - How would you describe your own response to this revelation that we celebrate during this grace-filled Advent and Christmas season?
  - How would you describe the impact this revelation has had on your life?
2. In the responsorial psalm, the psalmist asks the questions: "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?" The answers the psalmist gives are very challenging and convicting: "Who can ascend the mountain of the LORD? Or who may stand in his holy place? One whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain."
  - Are you challenged by the answers to the questions posed by the psalmist?
  - What role does faith in Jesus Christ, play in allowing us to "ascend the hill of the Lord" and "stand in his holy place" – especially in knowing that Jesus' "hands are sinless," his "heart is clean," and he died on the cross for our sins?
  - What role does the Sacrament of Reconciliation play in this as well?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul, calls himself a "slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God." He goes on to describe the "gospel of God" as "the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."
  - What steps can you and your family take to open yourself more to the graces that flow from the birth of our Savior and his subsequent work of salvation through his Cross and resurrection?
4. In the second reading, St. Paul also tells those he is writing to, and us, that we are "beloved of God."
  - Do you believe this? Why or why not?
  - What are some ways you have experienced God's love in a real and personal way?
5. In the Gospel reading, the time has come at last for the Messianic prophecies to be fulfilled. However, Joseph is initially presented with a monumental problem: Mary, his betrothed, is "found with child." Joseph's fears are eliminated when an "angel of the Lord" says these words to him in a dream: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."
  - How do your own reactions to the unexpected mirror or contrast with Joseph's initial reaction?
  - When you have fears regarding what God is asking in your life, do you believe God wants to give words of assurance to you just as he did for Joseph? In what ways has he done this?
6. The meditation provides a reflection on the meaning of the word Emmanuel: "God with us." It ends with these words: "So hold on to Jesus, God-with-us. Look for signs of his presence in your life. Wrap yourself in his protection. Most of all, rejoice in it! God has sent his Son to you. You have a Savior who is always with you!"
  - Reflect on these ending words from the meditation. How can you make them a greater reality in your life?
7. Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for his presence in your life and his faithfulness. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as a starting point.

***"Emmanuel, I step forth today rejoicing in your faithfulness and in the courage and freedom that you bring to my life."***

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is in partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>); a ministry of *The Word Among Us* ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)) to the military, prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. He is also a member of the **National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal** (<http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org/>) and a member of the board of directors of the **Christlife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization** (<https://christlife.org/>). Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men**, for which he is currently a Trustee (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>). He can be contacted at [mblumberg@wau.org](mailto:mblumberg@wau.org).]