

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**  
**December 24, 2023**

**Gospel: (Luke 1:26-38)**

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. He said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you... Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and shall name him Jesus... And Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age... for nothing is impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

**Reflection:**

Joseph receives little attention these days, even in Advent, but Joseph stands right beside Mary at the center of the stage. Joseph stands, with eager expectation, at the threshold of transcendence. From the darkness of his own limited understanding, he is continually peering into the mystery of God. Surely he cannot fathom the virginal conception of Jesus that the angel announces, but with loving compassion he bows in reverence to God's incomprehensible ways. Surely he does not understand how this child, who seems like any other, could be "God with us", but he abandons himself, in faith, to the task of loving the child and educating him. There is something very beautiful about Joseph's contact with the transcendent mystery of God. He was a carpenter and in the midst of his daily manual labor and family life, Joseph was surrounded by the mystery of God and he penetrated it with faith. He trusted in God's daily providence. (Maloney, Seasons of Spirituality, p.53)

**Words of Father Robert Maloney, C.M.**

"Imagine how Joseph felt as the birth of his mysterious son approached: puzzled, excited, awed. Deep faith was his light in the darkness. It enabled him to see the presence of God even where suffering, privation, and violence appeared to reign. Joseph knew the pain and embarrassment of poverty when there was no room in the inn. He witnessed violence when Herod unleashed his wrath against the children in Bethlehem. He felt persecution when he fled to Egypt. Yet he believed. He believed that God walked with him, that God is faithful to promises, that God is alive, and we can find God not only in the light but also in the darkness. He lived on the edge of mystery and was not afraid to gaze into it with courage in order to find God." (Maloney, Seasons of Spirituality, p.54)

**Discussion:** *(Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

**How does Joseph speak to you this Advent?**

**Closing Prayer:**

As we prepare for Christmas we pray for the grace to be like Joseph, so that:

For those who live in doubt,

**-our lives will be a sign of faith.**

For those who live in fear and oppression,

**-our lives will be a sign of hope.**

For those who do not experience God's love,

**-our lives will be a sign of charity. Amen**

