

**As we enter this last week of Advent**

**Our focus changes a bit**

**For the last 3 weeks the focus has been on preparing the way**

**Repentance and conversion of heart**

**Now we begin to anticipate who it is that is coming**

**In our readings today we have 2 names for Christ**

**Emmanuel, or God is with us**

**And Jesus, or God saves**

**The first tells us who Jesus is**

**His identity as both God and man**

**And the second tells us what he will do**

**He will save us from our sins**

**In our first reading we again encounter King Ahaz**

**A king of David's line who believed in the Davidic promise**

**But was childless himself**

**So he wondered how the Davidic line would continue**

**And since he had lost his faith**

**And was conspiring with the pagan Assyrian kingdom**

**Against his own people**

**He was in a quandary**

**Isaiah had already tried to convince him to remain faithful**

**But Ahaz turned away**

**He liked his plan over God's plan**

**So as things got more desperate**

**Isaiah tries again**

**In a false show of piety and humility**

**Ahaz refuses to listen**

***I will not tempt my Lord***

**So Isaiah gives him this sign**

***A virgin will be with child***

***And the child's name will be Emmanuel***

**Or God is with us**

**We see again a partial and a more complete fulfillment**

**Scripture studies tell us the word for virgin**

**Can be translated to mean a young girl**

**And one of Ahaz's young wives would give him a child**

**The Davidic line would continue**

**But this prophecy was fully fulfilled with Mary**

**When the virgin mother gave birth to her son**

**God is with us and continues to be with us**

**St Matthew tells us that Mary was betrothed to Joseph**

**For the Israelite community**

**Betrothal had the permanence of marriage**

**A woman found pregnant during this time would face being stoned**

**So Joseph is not sure what to do**

**He knows the child is not his**

**But he knows Mary**

**Had she explained things to him?**

**Even then, questions would remain**

**What should he do?**

**Even if he was convinced this was of God**

**And something magnificent was to happen**

**What role was there for him?**

**So, because he was a righteous man**

**He decided to divorce her quietly**

**Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream**

**Joseph, Son of David**

**Calling him by name and title**

**This is the fulfillment of the prophecy to David**

**That a king would be born from his line to rule Israel**

**Do not be afraid to take Mary into your home**

**Joseph would have a role in this child's life**

**He would have a role in Mary's life**

**Joseph would be charged with naming the boy**

**The traditional role of the father**

**Another detail is that Joseph was asleep when the angel came to him**

**He was asleep in more than one way**

**In a way, his doubt was a kind of sleep**

**And at the end he awoke**

**Again, more than just getting out of bed in the morning**

**He was awake in every sense**

**His doubt now gone**

**Obedient to the invitation the angel presented**

**In contrast to Ahaz**

**Joseph placed his plan in the hands of God**

**His vocation was to be the visible father of the visible God on earth**

**I am sure this encounter with the angel did not answer every question**

**But it was enough to open his heart**

**And make room for Mary and her son**

**That is one of the goals of Advent**

**An invitation for each of us**

**To open our hearts**

**Not to have all our doubts and questions answered**

**But to get ourselves out of the way**

**And make room for God in our heart**

**God knows this might be a bit frightening**

**What is he asking of me in my life?**

**Where is He leading me?**

**Is He going to take me from my family and loved ones?**

**Is He going to take them from me?**

**Will I be able to do what he is asking?**

**These questions and so many more**

**So he comes to us in a way that is not frightening**

**He does not appear with an army behind him**

**With a show of power**

**He comes to us as the most innocent and defenseless thing we know**

**He comes as a baby**

**Totally dependent on his parents as every baby is**

**Asking for us to make a bit of room in our heart**

**He is Emmanuel**

**God with us**

**He is present in our lives**

**In ways we can never imagine**

**Fulfilling his promise for all time**

**But not only is he with us**

**He is Jesus**

**He saves us from our sin**

**Both of these are intricately woven together**

**Emmanuel and Jesus**

**Jesus and Emmanuel**

**His divinity united to our humanity**

**So our humanity might be raised to his divinity**

**He saves us by giving us the best gift he could ever give**

**Himself**

**Better than any created thing**

**Like a married couple**

**The rings they exchange**

**Beautiful gifts**

**They are made more beautiful because of what they represent**

**The gift of each other to the other**

**Losing an engagement ring hurts**

**Because of what it represents**

**Losing a spouse hurts more**

**It is not the ring that makes one happy**

**It is the gift of the spouse**

**And as beautiful as marriage is**

**It is only a glimmer of the love God has for each of us**

**A love that is so great that God with us**

**Comes to save us**

**We will never escape pain and suffering in this world**

**God himself did not try to escape these things**

**He became one of us to show us the path**

**To invite us to walk with him**

**To give us hope in eternal life**

**Ahaz did not know what tomorrow would bring**

**He faced it with trepidation**

**Joseph did not know what tomorrow would bring**

**He faced it with faith and hope**

**We do not know what tomorrow will bring**

**We have a choice to make**

**Do I walk with Ahaz?**

**Following my plan, my dream**

**Hoping in human strength**

**Or do I walk with Joseph**

**In faith and hope in the One who is with us**

**Giving myself to the One who saves us**