

## **Reflection for 17-18 December 2016**

### **Second Sunday of Advent, Year A**

*Mike Britton*

*Text: Isaiah 7:10-14, Romans 1:1-7, Matthew 1:18-24.*

Imagine yourself, whatever your gender, as Mary. You are pregnant out of wedlock, and your fiancé is a working-class man from a good, perhaps somewhat conservative, family, in a society where the stigma of this pregnancy is even greater than it is here today. As a woman, you are very vulnerable, with no honorable means of being independent of men. Yes, it was the Holy Spirit that gave you the child, but do you really trust this man Joseph to even keep listening after you gather your courage to tell him, “I’m pregnant”? What will he do?

Imagine yourself, whatever your gender, as Joseph. Your fiancée has just told you that she’s pregnant, and you know for a fact that the child isn’t yours, because your families have made sure that you are together only under well-controlled conditions. If you marry her, everyone in town can do the math when the child is born, and the conclusions they’ll draw will lead to ridicule and loss of honor: either you slept with her before you were married, or someone else did. Dream or no dream, do you really believe this story of the Holy Spirit giving her a child?

Both Mary and Joseph trusted in God, and followed the call of the Spirit. That’s the obvious point, but there’s something more at work here, which I think prefigures Jesus’ message for us.

Mary and Joseph trusted in God, but they also trusted in each other, and chose to be worthy of that trust. Neither one could raise Jesus on their own; it was essential for God’s plan that they work together. This is a symbol and a prototype of our relationships: where we trust God, not only directly, but in each other, our coming together gives birth to greater love. The Sacrament of Marriage celebrates and blesses this in one way; the Sacrament of the Eucharist which we celebrate today is also an invitation to come together as a community and bring God’s love into the world.

Jesus teaches this later in Matthew’s Gospel, when he says, “‘Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.’”<sup>1</sup> Mary and Joseph were literally the first to gather in Jesus’ name, and God gave them and us more than they could imagine to ask. To achieve it, though, they

took a risk in trusting the other; if either had only gone part-way, holding back some of themselves, God's gift could not have been delivered.

The culmination of this message comes at the Last Supper and the Passion, when Jesus tells his disciples, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”<sup>2</sup> For us to be able to love one another, we must also open ourselves to receive that love from each other. As we open ourselves to God, so must we open ourselves to each other. That too is part of love, and it is not easy; for some of us, it is more difficult to receive than to give. We become as vulnerable as Mary was, as Joseph was, and we will be wounded as Jesus was wounded.

In all our comings together this Christmas, let us be mindful of God's call to genuine trust, so that we, like Mary and Joseph, may gift each other and the world with the tangible reality of God's bountiful love.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 18:19-20

<sup>2</sup> John 13:34-35