



Matthew 1:18-24

18 This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. 20 He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' 22 Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. 24 When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Other readings: Isaiah 7:10-14 Psalm 23 (24) Romans 1:1-7

We are accustomed to call the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary 'the annunciation'. This Sunday's gospel reading perhaps ought to be called 'the annunciation to Joseph'. Joseph is in fact the principal actor in the account of the birth of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. Like Mary, he too had to listen for the message of God. Like Mary, he too was invited to play his part in the working out of God's mysterious plan that the Son of God should become man. This gospel reading, just like the annunciation to Mary in the Gospel of Luke, gives us the basis for our belief in the virginal conception of Jesus. Here we find an expression of this mystery in the words of the angel to Joseph: 'she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit' (v.20). The Son of God is born among us in an utterly extraordinary way. The role of Mary as 'virgin mother' is quite unique, and Joseph has to go against his initial inclinations and make the decision to 'take his wife to his home' (verse 24).

In this reading we encounter the first of many verses which Matthew will quote from the Old Testament, declaring that they are 'fulfilled'. The text read at this Mass from the prophet Isaiah speaks of God's constant solidarity with the people. The fulfilment of this same text, which is announced by Matthew in the gospel reading, points to something even greater, the extraordinary intervention of God to bring the Son of God into the world.

Am I like Joseph willing to go against deeply felt ideas in order to do the will of God?

Why would God desire that the Saviour should be born by virginal conception?

Let us pray that we may welcome God's new ways as we prepare for Christmas.

Let us pray for the people of Palestine and Israel that they may have peace.