

Read

Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalm 89:4-5, 16-17,
27, 29

Acts 13:16-17, 22-25

Matthew 1:1-25 or 1:18-25

LIVING THE WORD

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

December 24 and 25, 2024



REFLECTION

In our Gospel today, Joseph is described as a righteous man. That's not a word we use very often nowadays, perhaps because it sounds uncomfortably similar to "self-righteous." So what does it mean that Joseph was righteous?

When Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant, he initially planned to divorce her but keep things quiet to spare her from public shame and punishment. Nevertheless, when an angel instructed him in a dream to take Mary as his wife despite her pregnancy, he obeyed without hesitation. He did not worry about what other people might think but trusted God's messenger.

A self-righteous person makes decisions motivated by pride or a desire to prove their superiority over others. In contrast, Joseph's righteousness came from a genuine desire to do what was right and holy. Joseph demonstrated humility, obedience, and a willingness to trust in God's plan, even when it went against his own expectations or could have hurt his reputation.

True righteousness is not about following a set of rules or achieving a certain status, but about a heart that is open to God's prompting and committed to doing what is right and just. May we seek to follow Joseph's example of integrity and holiness.



ACTION

Joseph cared about Mary's well-being, even when he thought she had wronged him. Choose someone who has hurt or offended you and find a way to show that person compassion and empathy. This could involve expressing forgiveness, offering practical support, or listening to his or her perspective without judgment.



The Nativity Story (2006)

? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ If you were in Joseph's shoes, how would you have responded to Mary's unexpected pregnancy?
- ❖ Do you know anyone you would describe as a "righteous" person? What attributes does that person have?

Introduction to **CHRISTMAS TIME**



days are known as the Octave of Christmas. Christmas Time will continue with the celebrations of the Epiphany of the Lord and the

The Season

Merry Christmas! It can be sad and frustrating that Christmas Time is often lost in sentimentality, stressful family tradition, out-of-control gift giving, and the prevailing belief that it is a day, not a season. While the focus of Christmas Time is on God's great love for humanity, which requires preparation, a period of celebration, and time for reflection, it is not uncommon to hear people say how grateful they are that Christmas is over on December 26! Those who leave Christmas decorations up until the end of the season may be viewed by neighbors and friends as either lazy or unduly nostalgic! Keeping the season of Christmas is worth the misunderstanding of others, however. The Gospel passages for this season are filled with familiar stories that bear repeating. And these are stories that we grow into as time passes. While children love the story of the baby Jesus, teens and adults may find themselves grasping small details and the larger themes of the season with greater depth each year.

This holy season provides time for us to immerse ourselves in the mysteries of God's love, our responsibility for ourselves and others, and the ways in which faith and life intersect through the decisions we make, the relationships we nurture, and the impact we have on the people around us. Christmas Time truly is a blessed season; a time of grace and wonder, a moment in which to linger spiritually, with lasting impact in our lives, relationships, and the way we love, now and into the future.

Matthew 1:18-25

Gospel

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,

LECTIONARY #13ABC

The readings are from the Vigil Mass.

Celebrating Christmas Time with Teens

Christmas Time is a season that is filled with many emotions. Teens likely look forward to Christmas as a season they remember from the time they are very young. Like many adults, they anticipate time with family, the giving of gifts, and time away from the regular routines of school and activities. They may also approach Christmas tenderly or with anxiety if someone close has recently died, if family members are estranged, or if some are not (or no longer consider themselves) Catholic. Such situations may feel like open wounds at this time of the year. Foster open discussions among the teens to help them experience God's great love in this season of life and grace.

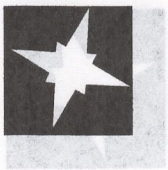
Preparing the Liturgical Environment

Use Christmas white lavishly to help set the tone for your gatherings with the youth in this season. Some pine boughs and candles will add a touch of the special quality of the season. The crèche (nativity scene) is a perfect accompaniment to your Christmas prayer area, along with the Bible open to the one of the Christmas narratives or a song book with a favorite carol displayed.

FOCUS: Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us.

Liturgical Calendar Connection

This year, Christmas Time lasts nearly three weeks, beginning with the vigil masses on Christmas Eve and concluding with the Baptism of the Lord on January 12, 2025. As we continue to live in the joy of the incarnation, of God-with-us, we will celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph on December 29 and the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God on January 1. These eight



December 24 and 25, 2024

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS)

LECTIONARY #13ABC

The readings are from the Vigil Mass.

Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalms 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29

Acts 13:16-17, 22-25

Matthew 1:1-25 or 1:18-25

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

The first seventeen verses of Matthew's Gospel (not included in the Scripture passage in this session) lists the genealogy of Jesus, starting with Abraham, through King David, and continuing on to Joseph. In today's Gospel, Joseph faithfully accepts God's plan for him and accepts Mary and her unborn baby as his own. As his ancestors had, Joseph trusted in God's plan for him and immediately responded in faith to his calling. In doing so, he fulfilled the covenant that God made with the Israelites, that the messiah would come through the descendants of King David. Jesus fulfills God's promise. The teens are invited to reflect on their own response to God's calling and how their family has led them to lives of faith.

Q FOCUS: *Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

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days are known as the Octave of Christmas. Christmas Time will continue with the celebrations of the Epiphany of the Lord and the Baptism of the Lord on January 5 and 12, respectively. During this joyful Christmas season, we celebrate and welcome Jesus into our lives and hearts.

Church Teaching Connection

"Thus, God is God-with-us, God who loves us, God who walks with us. This is the message of Christmas: the Word became flesh. Thus, Christmas reveals to us the immense love that God has for humanity. From this too derives our enthusiasm, our hope as Christians, that in our poverty we may know that we are loved, that we have been visited, that we are accompanied by God. . . . This closeness of God to man, to every man and woman, to each one of us, is a gift that never fades! He is with us! He is God-with-us!" (Pope Francis, Angelus Message, January 5, 2014).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 1:18-25

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but

before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "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." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel*, which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

In the verses that precede our Gospel reading today, there is a long list of names, giving the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew begins with Abraham, someone we are familiar with, and ends with Joseph, another name that we know well. In between are many names that we are not so familiar with. Matthew shares this genealogy because he wants to show how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation that he made to his chosen people, the Israelites. Throughout the centuries, the Jewish people were waiting for a messiah, an "anointed" or favored one, a king who would deliver the people of Israel, restore their glory, and ensure that their identity as God's chosen people would endure forever. Generation after generation, they waited for this messiah that was promised to them by God. This messiah would

be of the line of King David and have God's Spirit dwelling within him.

► **How many generations of your family can you identify? How does knowing where you come from impact your understanding of yourself?**

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus, as the Son of God, was traced back to King David, as the covenant promised, through Joseph. Joseph was Jesus' foster father. Even though Joseph was not Jesus' biological father, he still played an important role in Jesus' life because his qualities helped to shape the life of the Holy Family.

Joseph was a humble carpenter of Nazareth and a devout Jew. From the little we hear of him in Scripture, we know that he followed the Jewish law and was a righteous man. When Mary became pregnant, Joseph was going to do the honorable thing and divorce her quietly. Joseph was not going to bring undue attention to Mary's pregnancy, but rather, was going to quietly remove himself from the situation lest any shame or harm come to Mary, for there were harsh consequences for women getting pregnant outside of marriage at that time. But, through an angel, God called upon Joseph to take care of Mary and to raise Jesus as his son. Joseph did not question or waver in his faith. He immediately abandoned his own plans, placed his trust in God's, and did what he was commanded. Joseph was receptive to God's presence, heard his calling, and responded with faithfulness. This is the man who helped to raise Jesus by taking on the role of Jesus' earthly father during his early life.

► **Who in your family (or extended family or teachers or friends) has been a role model of faith for you?**

► **Have you ever felt God leading you in a certain direction? How did you respond? How can the model of Joseph teach us to respond to God's plan?**

The Gospel reading we read today does more than tell us the facts of Jesus' birth. It helps us to see how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. It shows us the importance of our heritage, both in our families and in our faith. It highlights the way our role models in the faith can help us to grow in our faith. We are reminded that "God is with us:"

Emmanuel. We can accomplish what God calls us to because he is always with us.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the “Church Teaching Connection” on page 102.

Joseph faithfully responded to and followed God’s plans for him.

Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promises to the people of Israel.

Through Jesus, the reign of God will endure forever.

Act on the Word

O Come, Emmanuel

For this activity, you will need copies of the lyrics of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” a recording of that hymn, pens, and paper.

Divide the young people into small groups. Pass out copies of the lyrics to “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” sheets of paper, and pens to the teens. Explain to them that the lyrics of this familiar hymn describe both the hope and darkness the people of Israel felt as they waited for the savior. Each verse begins with a title of Jesus that describes the promised Messiah. The verses then go on to describe what he will do for the people.

Play the song and have the young people listen carefully for themes of hope and darkness. Then assign each group a verse (or two) so that all verses are covered. In the small groups, have the teens reflect on the messianic title(s) in their verse(s) (for example, “O Wisdom” and “O Key of David”). Ask them to discuss what they think the title means, how it describes Jesus, and how it might have given hope to the Israelites.

Next, have them read the verses carefully and note any darkness that is described in the verses. Remind the teens that the Israelites went through many trials and tribulations as they waited for a savior, like being conquered by their enemies and being sent into exile. What darkness is described in the verse? Have the small groups further discuss and write down any themes of hope and trust they find in their verses. What is being hoped for in the verse? How would this hope help the people overcome the darkness?

Once the small groups have had time to discuss these things, have them share their observations with the larger group. Lead the group in a discussion and reflect on key points that the small groups brought up. Ask the teens about the hope and darkness they may have experienced during this Advent as they waited for the birth of Christ. How will they celebrate now that we have reached Christmas?

Closing Prayer

*O saving God,
who through the incarnation
of your only Begotten Son,
became one with all humanity.
Lifting our voices,
we sing “Glory and praise to you!”
for such a marvelous gift.*

*Fill our hearts with joy
so that we may rejoice at your coming.*

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday’s Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.