

Sermon Sunday December 21, 2025

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love.

47 years ago, whilst serving a military tour of duty on the Angolan border my friend Gary, our unit radio operator tapped me on the shoulder, presented the daily decoding sheet and a message from HQ, with the words: “please double check my decoding.” Oddly, his hands were shaking. His decoding was accurate. It was our standby order to prepare for withdrawal from the operations zone. *We were going home!* Our commanding officer read the message and excitement roared through camp like an unstoppable wildfire. My personal Advent was going to see my beautiful wife and our son. Going home. Expectations. Waiting. Wishing the days would pass more quickly. I’d last seen them when Clifford was just one week old, seemingly an eternity ago. On this very day, December 21, 1978, our convoy took us from Cape Town airport to WP Command and there were Janet and Clifford amongst the large very, very excited and squealing crowd. It was our personal advent fulfilling reunion. We were united again and enjoyed a quiet Christmas together.

Some days turning on the news simply makes me cringe. My toes curl at the craziness and often ugliness surrounding us. As Kay alluded to last Sunday, we have choices. We can either let it get us down, or we can try find a way to deal with it. Often easier said than done.

Personally, I try to look at the bright side of a situation. I don’t always succeed, but it is worth trying! It’s Advent: Prepare us Lord for your coming into our world again! Purify us, restore us, grant us faith as you did Joseph and Mary! We realize we need our Lord’s assistance to be restored.

- 1) Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Abrahms: God has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time. 2003
- 2) David Jacobsen in Feasting on the Gospels... Mathew, Volume 1: A Feasting on the Word Commentary, 2013.

Sermon Sunday December 21, 2025

We have so much to look forward to this Advent! Today is our winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. As of tomorrow, the days start getting longer. Spring and warmth are only a couple months away, *but they are on their way*. Look forward to it. Embrace it. Considering the secular, how about that delightful Christmas dinner with friends and family? How about those gifts under the tree? How about those delighted and surprised looks when grandchildren open a gift?

Today's readings are rich with the promise of things to come. The Collect exhorts us to purify **our** conscience. Not **I**, but **we** collectively should work at it. Imagine what Mary and Joseph must have been going through? Their soul searching, their questions, their doubts when God surprised them with the message of fulfilling what the prophet Isaiah had foretold of a young woman with a child who shall be named Emmanuel (God be with us). When the angel told Mary she would be with child, she was probably rather shocked. "How can this be? I'm a virgin." Can you imagine the confusion, perhaps even anguish she might have been in?

How about Joseph? His betrothed was found to be with child. He probably felt hurt, anger and betrayal. He may even have felt betrayed by God. Where was the future he had dreamed of? However, being a decent man, he decided to dismiss her quietly. When something goes awry, how often do we try to blame someone else or something else? Perhaps even God? However, God intervened in a dream. "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife." She gave birth to a son and he Joseph named him Jesus.

- 1) Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Abrahms: God has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time. 2003
- 2) David Jacobsen in Feasting on the Gospels... Mathew, Volume 1: A Feasting on the Word Commentary, 2013.

Sermon Sunday December 21, 2025

Simply put, both Joseph and Mary gave of themselves and moved forwards with humility, courage and integrity. They followed God's instructions. They had so many challenges and changes to work through, but they persevered. Their lives were literally turned inside out, which ultimately resulted with the dreams in the hearts of many that could be revealed. They moved forwards in faith!

We all experience those challenging, difficult, painful moments in life – this is life! The key is: ***Joseph and Mary facing challenges, moved forwards in faith.*** We cannot change the past. Our challenge is to learn from the past. Look forwards to the future. Eternity awaits us, no matter what the ups and downs we go through with concerns about everyday living. Budgets, insurance, health, politics, maybe family concerns. With faith we can all say, "I am at peace because I know what awaits me." May we have faith to make the right choices, and if not, may we have faith to ask for forgiveness. It is a win-win!

In his book, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote: "we all experience sadness, we all come at times to despair, and we all lose hope that the suffering in our lives and the world will ever end" but he continued ... there is no such thing as a totally hopeless case. Our God is an expert at dealing with chaos, brokenness, with all the worst we can imagine. He created order out of disorder. He can do so now in our personal lives, in our lives as nations and globally. He is transforming the world now, through us, because He loves us."¹

Then there's the political turmoil and violence in the land around the time of Jesus' birth. Heavy handed overbearing Roman rule. High taxes. Theft. Wars

- 1) Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Abrahms: *God has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time*. 2003
- 2) David Jacobsen in *Feasting on the Gospels... Mathew, Volume 1: A Feasting on the Word Commentary*, 2013.

Sermon Sunday December 21, 2025

and threats of wars. The cruel rule with suppression and violence of King Herod, continued by his sons as rulers when he passed away.

Jesus arrived in the middle of these rough times. Despite the circumstances of his conception and birth, his parents probably wanted to bring him up as a normal child, but there came the time when they were frantically searching for him and he was happily, “going about his Father’s (God’s) business” in the synagogue where he astounded those questioning him. I think I’d be rather angry if my son had disappeared like that, then too relieved to be upset when found. Evidently Joseph and Mary prepared themselves and moved forwards with kindness, honor and acceptance of what our Lord wanted them to do. They were living the words of today’s Psalm. Restore us, O God of hosts; show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.

We cannot be idle. We need to be active in our strength to accept our Lord’s input. We might ask to be restored, but we cannot do it alone. We need God’s assistance. God gives us the means of grace through His word, through the sacraments, baptism, eucharist, penance, scripture, prayer and community sharing. May He give us strength enough to see light even in the bleakest of situations. To look for good, for humor and to strive for faith enough to believe that goodness will prevail in the end.

Is it a dream?

Yeats wrote that “in dreams begin responsibility.” Mary and Joseph epitomized this for us then, and their story does now. Joseph, son of Jacob trusted the voice of God in the prophets. He had to deal with the mission and purpose of what

- 1) Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Abrahms: God has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time. 2003
- 2) David Jacobsen in Feasting on the Gospels... Mathew, Volume 1: A Feasting on the Word Commentary, 2013.

Sermon Sunday December 21, 2025

started out as a messy situation. Remember, an angel tells Joseph in a dream to take Mary as his wife and to accept this child as his own. And to name him Jesus (Yeshua). He is destined to save people from their sins.

The critical point here is simply summarized in Mathew. This pregnancy is sanctified by the Spirit. Consider this: we weren't there. There is no way of finding further proof, other than accepting and trusting the Spirit! "Remember I am with you always." (Mathew 28:20)

"The birth of Jesus is the birth of a new world, even as the old one is tottering around us."² Jesus' birth changes the situation from the here and now to a new moment with new opportunities. None of this nor Christianity would have been possible without Judaism. This is part of the joy of faith. Our situation is very similar to that of Israel: "Repent and Return, Repent and return." It's our Faith Journey.

Literally and spiritually, happy are those who keep the faith forever. May we have courage like Joseph. God took a risk that a very human Joseph could get past an apparent betrayal when he heard the news of Mary's pregnancy. God had to trust that Joseph could set this aside. Joseph listened to an angel in a dream! Additionally, he was urged to name this child Jesus just as though he were his own son. And he did!

When we step up and act with forgiveness and hope and trust, the world around us changes. So often a seemingly small right action that we take is what the future hangs on. It's Advent and today is the shortest day of the year. Time is running out. Christmas is right around the corner. Are we ready?

- 1) Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Abrahms: God has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time. 2003
- 2) David Jacobsen in Feasting on the Gospels... Mathew, Volume 1: A Feasting on the Word Commentary, 2013.

Sermon Sunday December 21, 2025

The most common phrase in the bible is “Do not be afraid.” Mary and Joseph needed this reassurance. We need that reassurance now. Do not be afraid. God created the world in the beginning and now we celebrate the birth of Christ as God creates it anew in Jesus. God will make the world new through him, and thus through us. This is the future. Our future. Embrace it and look forward to it. Amen.

- 1) Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Abrahms: God has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time. 2003
- 2) David Jacobsen in Feasting on the Gospels... Mathew, Volume 1: A Feasting on the Word Commentary, 2013.