

## Welcome to this Advent Reflection for the Third Week in Advent



You may like to light a candle as you begin this time of quiet and reflection

### **Opening Prayer**

**Holy God, this is earth's quiet season, the season of waiting.  
We rest in the shelter of your love.**

**This is the season of darkness, when we seek stars to guide us.  
We trust in the light of your promise.**

**This is the season of solitude, when we listen for our heart's rhythm  
and find warmth in the signs of your presence.**

**This is our season to make room, a time to make ready.**

### **Come Lord Jesus**

Often, by the third week in Advent, Christmas has taken over. Familiar carols replace Advent hymns, preparations and celebrations drown out moments of quietness, and a growing anxiety about everything still to be done threatens to overwhelm us.

This year is different. We cannot sing carols together; we have slowed down so, although there is less to do, everything takes longer; and whilst the anxiety remains, the pandemic has taught us what really matters: the people we love, health, our country and our world; the suffering of others.

With so much division and suffering, can we really speak of joy and hope this Advent?

I believe we can. Not just because the coming of the vaccine has given us hope but because our faith in our Risen Lord enables us to say with confidence that a light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never overcome it. Despite everything that has happened this year, we remain people of hope for we are preparing to celebrate the coming of our Lord Jesus, born to Mary and Joseph, the parents whom God chose to be the first to receive him into their hearts.

In the drama of the Incarnation, Jesus is, of course, the star. That's the way it is with a birth. All eyes are on the baby. The co-star is the mother and the story of the Angel Gabriel's visit to Mary is so familiar. One cannot imagine a Nativity play or a Carol Service without it. But the same cannot be said of Joseph's story. Only once in every three years is his story read on the last Sunday in Advent and even then it may be replaced by a Christmas service.

As we read the story, let us reflect on the kindness and obedience of this remarkable man of faith. Why, we might wonder, has he failed to capture an equal share of the limelight?

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and his name shall be called Emmanuel"

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son, and he called his name Jesus.

## Music

The antiphon **O Radix Jesse** describes Jesus, but it reflects the genealogy of Joseph who is descended from Jesse, the father of David, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah:

*"Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit."*

The antiphon is played twice, with the Magnificat, Mary's great hymn of praise, in the middle so it becomes a musical illustration of how Mary and Jesus are to be surrounded by Joseph's love and care. That care is to take them to Egypt as they flee from Herod, brings them back to Israel and settles them in Nazareth where Jesus grows up and prepares for his public ministry. Joseph's obedience entails a lot of walking!

O Radix Jesse with the Magnificat

<https://youtu.be/kGRLFJwLJSM>

**The dream of Joseph by Philippe de Champaigne  
1642-3 may be viewed by clicking on the link below**

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/philippe-de-champaigne-the-dream-of-saint-joseph>

## **Saint Joseph**

There are many paintings of Mary and Gabriel but when, before the days of Google, I began to look for any paintings that showed the angel's visit to Joseph, I failed to find a single one until one day, walking through the National Gallery, I came across this.

Thanks to the internet it is now possible to see others but they are mostly painted about the same time perhaps because, in 1621, the Church designated the 19<sup>th</sup> of March as an annual day of devotion to St Joseph and this generated some interest which has since faded.

In this painting Joseph sleeps, his tools by his side and his discarded sandals at his feet. It seems he has made his decision and his face suggests it was not an easy one.

Matthew makes it clear - Joseph is described as a just man who decides not to expose Mary to public disgrace. He is close to God and obeys the Law. In this instance, however, instead of following the Law, which demanded punishment, Joseph decides to act according to the law of love and show mercy.

The arrival of the angel – in what we might call a “Holy Interruption” - introduces a third option – a better way, God's way.

God tells Joseph to change his plan. Against all the accepted norms of life at that time, he is to take Mary and the child into his life and his home and his protection. He listens, believes and obeys.

***In a dream, Joseph is shown a better way to go, God's way.  
Have we experienced something we might call a Holy Interruption?  
What might God be saying to us today about changing direction?***

When Jesus was dying on the cross, he chose the disciple John to take on the role of son to his mother Mary. For the birth of His Son, God chooses Joseph to be the earthly father. Joseph is to be the male role model for the Son of God who, Luke tells us, grew in wisdom and grace.

Luke tells us Joseph fulfilled his religious duties as a father, taking Jesus to be presented to the Lord in Jerusalem and returning every year at the feast of the Passover. We last see him when Jesus is 12.

As usual, Joseph and Mary take him to Jerusalem – but this time Jesus does not leave with them. He stays behind in the temple which he calls “my Father's house”. Later he does return to their care but Joseph's role in God's great act of salvation, as recorded in the Bible, comes to an end.

Joseph is the Patron Saint of carpenters, pregnant women, fathers, children, travellers and immigrants but over the last few months, when it has become clear how “our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked” [‘Padris Corde’, Pope Francis’ Letter 8/12/20], Joseph stands as a reminder of how much is owed to the people, often under-valued, without whom our lives would have been so much harder during the pandemic. We owe them our thanks.

Like Joseph, they deserve their sleep and like him, they remind us that whilst we may feel insignificant, each of us has an important role to play within God’s kingdom.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, longing for things to get back to normal but knowing that we don’t want everything to go back to how things were, let us give thanks that the message of Christ’s coming remains the same. It is we who may need to change.

### **Closing Prayer**

Come to us Lord Jesus  
in times of joy, in times of sorrow,  
when we are tired, afraid or angry  
when we are rested and at peace.

Come to us Lord Jesus  
and lead us out of darkness into light;  
out of deafness into listening and  
out of silence into speaking of you.

Come Lord Jesus  
Calm our fears, heal our wounds,  
fulfil our longings  
and in the child of Bethlehem  
break down the walls that divide and hurt us.  
May your star of hope shine bright and clear  
for all who look for light this Christmas.  
Amen

### **Hymn**

#### **Lo he comes with clouds descending**

<https://youtu.be/en0sv1jeDws>

