

# 4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## St. Matthew 1:18-24

St. Joseph, the most chaste spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and so chosen to be the earthly father of the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In many ways St. Joseph's story is similar to other narratives of miraculous births. Take, for example, St. Zechariah, the father of St. John the Baptist, to whom it was announced by the angel of the Lord, that his wife, St. Elizabeth, would give birth to a son. Now it was not that St. Zechariah did not want a son, it was that he thought it ridiculous that the old woman who was his wife could possibly become pregnant and bear a child. Because of his scepticism St. Zechariah was struck dumb and remained unable to speak until the birth of his son. Take, also, an earlier example—that of Abraham, the great father of faith. When El-Shaddai, God, declared to him that he would have as many descendants as the stars in the sky and the sand on the shore of the sea, he was not convinced—in fact scripture records that he laughed—seeing that his wife, Sarah, was ninety years old.

St. Joseph, then, fits into this history of announcements of miraculous fatherhood. The difference, however, between St. Joseph and others like St. Zechariah and Abraham, is that St. Joseph not only believed what was revealed to him but had the mind to believe it to be true.

It might be said that St. Joseph had great faith and despite the shame that would be brought upon the Blessed Virgin Mary and him he believed enough to consider that what was said to him could be true. St. Joseph had to imagine that the Blessed Virgin Mary had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and would bear a child who would save all men and women from death. If one says that St. Joseph had great faith, then he had great faith, because he had the

mind to have that faith.

We know from letters that Mother Teresa doubted the existence of God. She wrote that she could no longer imagine God's existence. On the surface one might say that she, at times, stopped believing in God. But the fact was, she did not stop believing in God, but, rather, she could no longer imagine how God exists. It was not so much a battle of faith as it was a battle of imagination. The difficulty she had was with the limits and poverty of the human imagination. That is, she could not picture how God exists.

Faith demands imagination. For those who doubt the parting of the Red Sea, or the virgin birth of our Lord, or the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, or even the bodily resurrection, it might not simply be a matter of faith, but, rather, a lack of imagination. In faith one might believe that God can do these things, but with imagination one believes that God does do these things.

St. Joseph is the great side-lined saint, yet he gives so much. His great faith, borne of great imagination, serves to remind not what God might do, but what God does.

St. Joseph, in the midst of the scandal and outrage, was not only imaginative enough to bear patiently with the situation, but had the mind to lean back on the Lord and see, in faith, that what God had said had happened, must really have happened.

So as the great drama of the birth of the Lord approaches, we must abandon ourselves to divine providence and allow the Holy Spirit to flood our mind with the reality of the great birth of God made man in Jesus Christ and the great reality that Jesus Christ is coming again.