

Awaiting Emmanuel

Spend Time Listening

Isaiah 7:10–14; Romans 1:1–7; Matthew 1:18–25

Behold. Listen. Because, after a pregnancy that quietly changed the course of history, and a dream in the night that quietly changed history again, a baby is going to be born in a small stable, amid the hushed rustles and deep sighs of the animals slumbering in the dark.

Behold the calm before the arrival of the Lord, a child who will one day take the world by storm.

Behold the power that could move mountains and part seas, as its thunderous strength is corralled into the mewing and cooing of an infant.

It is magnificent all the more for taking the shape of vulnerability, humility, and love.

For many of us, the days leading up to the Fourth Sunday of Advent have been relentlessly busy, full of parties and planning, friends and feasting, giving and doing.

So, for today, as the moment draws near, we pause to contemplate the mag-

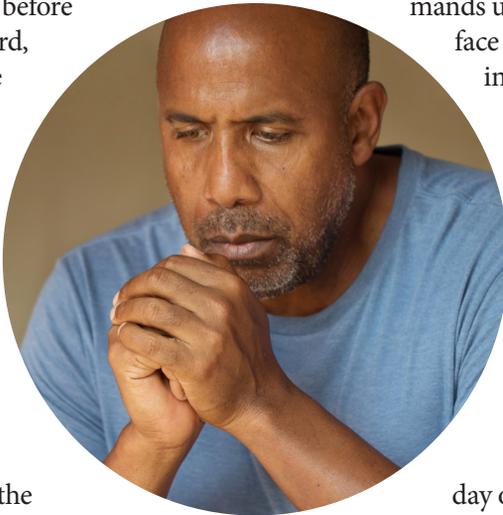
nitude of this greatest miracle.

It's a miracle dependent on vast reservoirs of faith — that of Mary, to say yes to the Angel Gabriel, and that of Joseph, to stay with Mary at the command of the angel in his dream.

How often do we buck the pressures of society to do as the Lord commands us, especially if we face great shame? Speaking truth is difficult.

Living truth is risky. It could mean alienation, lost opportunities, or criticism. Mary and Joseph both knew that ... and yet they obeyed. Could you do it?

On this final Sunday of Advent, just a few days away from the celebration of this great gift, take some time to pause amid the flurry of preparations and expectations. Maybe even say no to a few things today, so that you may say yes to the invitation to greet this new life. Spend some time listening. Behold the magnificent miracle that takes place in the quiet night.



POINTS TO PONDER

- ▶ Can you think of a time when it was risky or scary to say yes to Jesus' call? What did you do?
- ▶ How can you carve out some calm to behold the coming of Christ?
- ▶ Do you know someone who is a model of strength and courage on behalf of God?

The Celebration Doesn't End

The twelve days of Christmas aren't just the lyrics to an old carol; they are also part of Church tradition, when we wait for the coming of the three Wise Men. Look back at your plans and reflections from the four weeks of Advent and carry them forward through the Epiphany on January 6. Even better, as we described in the first week, shape your new habits into a lifestyle. Because, even when the Christmas season has ended, we still are watching and waiting for the day when he comes again!





What's in a Name?

Today's Gospel tells us that Christ will be called Emmanuel, meaning, "God is with us" (Mt 1:23). This fulfills a prophecy by Isaiah: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel" (Is 7:14).

The Gospel also says that Joseph called the baby Jesus, as instructed by

the angel, for "he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21).

While "Jesus" may have been the name his friends and family used in the usual way we think of a name, both of Christ's names — Jesus and Emmanuel — describe his roles, becoming man and saving man. As we await Emmanuel during Advent, we look forward to that time when God is with us here on earth.

Awaiting *Together*

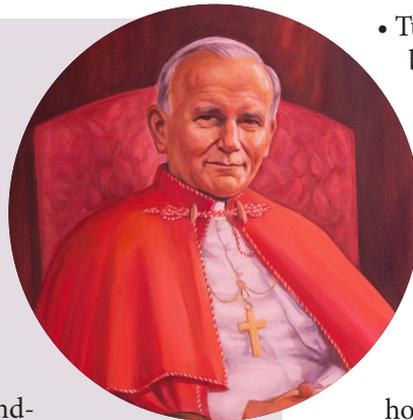
Perhaps one of the most memorable traditions you can establish during Advent is carving out time for quiet. I have deeply spiritual memories of riding to Christmas Eve Mass with my sisters and parents in a silent car, through dark and silent streets, when everything closed early to honor the holiday. It lent a special intimacy and anticipation to the near arrival of Jesus. How might you behold him? Perhaps ...



Raising Your Hand

"Be generous in answering Jesus' call inviting you to put out into the deep and become his witnesses, discovering the trust he puts in you to devise a future together with him," Pope St. John Paul II said in a 2003 address to young people. "To fulfill this mission the Church is entrusting to you requires that you cultivate a genuine life of prayer nourished by the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and confession."

Prayer and the sacraments help inform our understanding of what the Lord commands, to discern what we're asked to do, and how and when we should speak out. And the Father will be by our sides to give us strength and courage to say yes.



- Turn off the lamps and dine by the light of all four Advent wreath candles now through Christmas.
 - Spend ten minutes each day in silence, meditating on courage, Jesus' miraculous birth, or God's call for you.
 - If you haven't already, set up a Nativity scene in your home. Invite members of your family to describe elements of the scene as they might imagine it.

An Advent Prayer

Dear God, be near me and give me strength and courage when I go out into the world to do your will. May my yes be as unshakeable as Joseph and Mary's. I'm listening for your call. Amen.

