

Lessons for the Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 18, 2022

Psalm 24 ~ *A song celebrating the king's entrance into Zion at the head of his people.*

Isaiah 7:10-17 ~ *God's sign of peace to Ahaz is also the promise of our Savior's birth.*

Romans 1:1-7 ~ *The good news God's prophets promised is fulfilled in Jesus, our Lord.*

Matthew 1:18-25 ~ *Joseph, agonizing over Mary's pregnancy, was reassured by the angel.*

GATHERING THE TEXTS: God's Power in Love

While Syria and Samaria prepared to attack, King Ahaz of Judah was given a sign of God's love so he could wait patiently: Immanuel - "God is with us." St. Paul introduced himself to the Romans as an apostle set apart to proclaim the Gospel of God's love in Christ Jesus, descendant of David and Son of God. When Joseph struggled with his loyalty to God's law and his love for Mary, God answered in Jesus: God himself would save his people from their sins.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE: Lord, stir me up with Your mercy so that I may be comforted by Your love in Christ my Savior. Keep me ready to welcome Him always; help me live so that my faith is active in love toward my neighbors at all times. Amen.

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT: God is with us in the person of Christ Jesus, to help us through hard decisions without oppressing others. We are free to deal with others in loving ways, as resources to our neighbors in their bondage, inviting them to the freedom provided in the good news of God's redeeming presence in their lives.

OFFERING PRAYER: Dear Lord, by the sign of Your love and a messenger's Word,
Even Joseph was bold to take Mary as wife
And to name Your Son 'Jesus,' Your Gift to the world!
Make us bold to proclaim Your sweet message of Life! Amen.

CONVICTION AND COMFORT: Our lives are often beset by turmoil and conflict. Hard decisions twist us between alternatives, none of which are desirable. Left to our own choices we either indulge ourselves or take advantage of others, or both. God has promised to be with us in these hard times as well as the good ones. He fulfilled that promise in the birth of Jesus, the promised One, called Immanuel - 'God with us.' Trusting in His promise we are joined to His resurrection and rescued from the bondage of sin and death.

Questions to Consider: Which is motivation for acts of kindness, faith or love?

- How can the birth of a child in Isaiah's day be a sign of God's love to his people?
- What did St. Paul describe as the sign that Jesus is God's Son?
- What is the sign of Joseph's love for Mary?
- Where do you see God's love when you are facing impossible choices?

Bonus on next page: a description of "God with us" showing his love in difficult times

FAITH TRACKS - 2

Not knowing
how or where or when,
nor to what mortal end
your life was flowing,
yet setting
out with confidence
that God alone made sense,
and humbly letting
the Spirit
lead you on the way
by what God had to say
when you could hear it,
now, nearly
stumbling, you look back
and see the winding track
of faith more clearly.

- Gilbert A Franke, 10/29/08