

## 2019 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

I came upon a piece of creative writing recently which vividly brought home to me the reality that Joseph and Mary were young and deeply in love. It brought today's Gospel alive for me. I would like to share it with you.

Throughout the piece it is Joseph who is speaking.

When it was arranged that I should become betrothed to Mary, I was filled with happiness. Mary was a beautiful young woman who was always full of life and music. For many years I have walked past her father's house and heard her voice coming through the windows as she sang loudly. She was so full of joy. Sometimes I heard her making up songs as she does now around our house. No one could have asked for a more perfect wife- and in the weeks after our betrothal when she came to live in my house- my heart was filled with praise and gratitude to God.

But it all changed one day when Mary came to my shop as I worked. I could see by the expression on her face that something was different. "Joseph", she said, "I must tell you something that will be difficult for you to understand. I do not understand it myself, but I do feel a great peace about it."

I drew her to the chairs in the corner of the shop and stretched out my hands to hold hers. "Mary, beloved, whatever it is, nothing you say can change my love for you."

She looked at me with her dark, piercing eyes and tightened her grip in my hands. "Joseph, I am with child. I cannot say how it happened. I can only tell you that Gabriel, a messenger from the Lord, appeared to me and told me I would conceive a son. He said this son would be great and would be called Son of the Most High."

My head was dizzy and my heart felt empty. What was she saying? Mary was with child? But we had never slept together. Then who? How could this be? I looked at her and could not speak.

"Joseph," she said again. "I know this is difficult for you. I myself only believe it because it came from God."

Suddenly what she was saying hit me with great force. "What do you mean?" I exploded. "You are with child?" I pulled my hands away and I knew

myself to be filling with anger. "What about our plans?" I spluttered. And my reputation! I will be the laughing stock of Nazareth!"

I looked at Mary in anger. But she sat quietly. I looked into her wonderful eyes and they were radiantly peaceful. "You are with child! Whose child?" I demanded.

She reached for my hands again- but I shook them away. "Joseph, please hear what I am saying. The messenger said I would be with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph", she whispered, 'he said this child would be called holy...the Son of God!"

"Leave!" was all I could say to her. "Leave me now and do not return," I said harshly. She looked heartbroken but I did not allow myself to feel sorry for her. She was clearly taking me to be a fool!

She arose and walked to the door of the shop where she turned. "I have been with no man, Joseph. I am only the handmaiden of the Lord." She left quietly.

I could not work that day. I left my shop and walked for hours out beyond the edge of the date groves, kicking the dusty road ahead of me. I searched for comfort from the Psalms but found none. I wept and begged God for some answer to all of this. By the time it grew dark, I was tired and had made my decision. I would divorce her. I would do it quietly so she would not be stoned to death as the law called for. But she could not be my wife. No way! I returned home in great sadness. I could not eat and fell on my mat utterly exhausted.

It was while I was sleeping that it happened. An angelic messenger came to me. "Joseph, you must believe Mary," he said. "Your fears must not block you from hearing this message from the Lord to you. Do not be afraid to take Mary into your home as your wife. It is through the Holy Spirit that she has conceived and a son will be born, a son who will save his people from their sins."

When I awoke I felt a great peace upon me but it took me a moment to remember all that had happened since yesterday. I sat up suddenly. Mary! I must find Mary. I hurried through the town looking for her. She was in the back garden of her father's house, sitting quietly.

"Mary!" I called. She turned and gave me a beaming smile. "I knew you would come!" she said. "When I left your house yesterday I turned to the Lord

again and asked that He send me some support in this difficult journey. Yet in my heart, Joseph, I knew it was to be you. Thank- you for believing me.”

I was ashamed as I told her the truth- I had not believed her but the Lord had also sent me the same messenger who had repeated what Mary had already said to me. The child was to be the Messiah! And Mary and I were to raise this long-awaited child as our son. There was fear in my heart as I thought of this but I remembered that the angel had told me not to let my fears keep me from hearing what the Lord was calling me to.

“Here I am Lord, I will always do Your will,” I said softly.

I looked at Mary- my Mary- and reached for her hand again. “We will be together in this Mary. We will raise our Son to be faithful and obedient to the laws and He will bring us great joy.”

Quietly respond in personal prayer for a minute or two.