

## Homily of Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A, 2025

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24:1-6; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-24

Today, we light the fourth candle, which is called the candle of love. The circle is complete. The first candle symbolizes hope. The second candle symbolizes peace. The third candle symbolizes joy.

The first Christmas happened because “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:16). “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). We live in love of God and appreciate his love for us when we reciprocate God’s love by sharing his love with fellow human beings. By so doing, Christmas is properly celebrated. “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.” (1 John 4:20-21). Lighting the candle of love is our prayer that love may conquer hate and animosity. May the Advent journey and Christmas celebrations enable us to become channels of God’s love.

In the first reading, Ahaz, the king of Judah, refused to trust God and do what God commanded him to do. At that time, Ahaz was surrounded by his enemies, the king of Damascus and the king of Samaria. Ahaz was frightened. God sent Isaiah to him to encourage him not to panic, and not to seek support from pagan nations. Ahaz refused and aligned himself with the king of Assyria, built pagan altars of Assyrian gods, and led the people astray. Ahaz was defeated, and history records that more than 120,000 of his soldiers were killed, and thousands of Judeans were carried off as captives to Damascus.

During difficult times, let us not panic or seek solution through sinful means. God does not approve solutions through sinful means. Any apparent solution through sinful means is bound to fail sooner or later. Therefore, let us, always, trust God and wait for him to act (Psalm 37).

Unlike Ahaz, Mary said ‘yes’ to God and became the channel through which Jesus came into the world. In the same way, God has been inviting us throughout the Advent journey to become channels of his love in our world. This is what St. Paul means in the second reading where he says, “We have received the grace of apostleship” (Romans 1:5). We are, therefore, apostles and messengers of God’s love. An apostle or a messenger listens to the voice of his master or her mistress and does the will of his master or her mistress, not his or her own will.

Joseph is another example for us. In today’s gospel, he faced a difficult situation. He was not responsible for Mary’s pregnancy. The gospel tells us that Joseph, being a righteous man, was unwilling to expose Mary to shame. He decided to divorce her quietly. Why?

In ancient Israel, women were given to marriage at a very young age. Most girls were betrothed before they were fourteen years old. With such culture, premarital sex was very rare. However, in the Old Testament, there are harsh punishments for premarital sex and premarital or

extramarital pregnancy. For instance, if a man marries a girl who was presented to be a virgin, and later he finds out that she is not a virgin, “they shall bring the young woman to the entrance of her father’s house and there the men of her town shall stone her to death, because she committed a shameful crime in Israel by prostituting herself in her father’s house” (Deuteronomy 22:19-21). Joseph had concluded not to subject Mary to such shameful and cruel punishment even before the angel of the Lord visited him with instructions from God. Joseph, surely, was a devout Jew, but not a slave of the law. How often do we judge and punish others without mercy! Joseph’s self-control, understanding, compassion, and obedience to God’s will are a challenge to us.

Unlike Ahaz who did not listen to Isaiah, Joseph listened to the message of the angel of the Lord and did what God directed him to do. He did not divorce Mary. He took her as his wife, and by so doing, he became the foster father of Jesus.

Always, in one way or another, God sends us messengers and messages. Do we listen to him? Indeed, we have a lot to learn from Joseph’s response to the news of Mary’s pregnancy.

Today’s gospel tells us that ‘Emmanuel’ means “God is with us” (Matthew 1:23). Yes, Jesus is God made flesh. He is the reason for the season. Therefore, over and above the commercial and social activities of the season, Jesus remains the reason for the season.

Through him, God is with us always to the end of time (Matthew 20:28). God be with us this Christmas season. God be with us as the year 2025 ends. God be with us when the New Year begins. With you, O God, no one can be against us. Amen.

**Fr. Martin Eke, MSP**