



Fourth Sunday of Advent

18 December 2022

**The Episcopal Church of the
Good Shepherd in Athens, Ohio**

Seeking to know and serve Christ in loving service to the campus, the community, and the world.

Today's printed [Order of Worship](#)



Today we light four the candles on the Advent Wreath. The fourth candle represents Love. Not the love of human sentiment, romance, friendship, or even parent and child love. Of course, the love it represents is the Love of God as it was made known to us in Jesus. We reflect on God's Love so close to Christmas because it is how we will know Jesus when he comes again to judge the world. God's judgement is not out of anger or disappointment, but love, a love that gave everything to be with us.

The fourth candle in the Advent Wreath also represents angels, the messengers of God. Both Advent and Christmas seasons are

heavily populated with angels who bring good news to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. Throughout the Bible, you will notice one of the primary functions of angels is delivering messages from God. Most of the time angels begin their messages with the words: "Do not be afraid." Perhaps this is another way of saying the message God sends us is not one of anger, but of love, so while the message might be unexpected, it is nothing to fear.

When we light the candles on the Advent Wreath, we light all the ones that we have before, not only so we know what week we are in, how close we are to Christmas, but also because all four points of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love illumine the season and carry us to Christmas as they reveal God at work in the world today, bringing God's Kingdom that much closer.

Lessons

Lessons for the Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year A)

Old Testament – Isaiah 7: 10-16

Psalm 80: 1-7, 16-18 (Sung)

New Testament – Romans 1: 1-7

Gospel – Matthew 1: 18-25

<https://www.lectionarypage.net>

The Collect

PURIFY OUR CONSCIENCE, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The Gospel



Matthew 1:18-25

NOW THE BIRTH OF JESUS the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Gospel Engagement Question:

Today's Gospel brings up God's plans which were different from Joseph's plans. Can you think of a time when this happened in your life?

The Sermon

New Kind of Family

In a time when it is more socially acceptable to be cynical instead of believing, to respond to change or when life feels overwhelming by quitting or walking away instead of adapting, we need someone like Joseph in today's Gospel to show us there is another way. The way of God.

Today we have Matthew's version of Jesus' birth. Like in Luke's Gospel we will hear on Christmas Eve, we learned Mary and Joseph were betrothed or engaged, but not yet living together as a married couple. We also learned Mary was pregnant and Joseph was not the father. This can be insulting in any culture, and in the time and place Mary and Joseph lived, it was devastating. Not only did it mean an end to the possible dreams Joseph had about life with his wife, but it also most likely meant an end to Mary's promised security. An illegitimate pregnancy meant Joseph didn't have to follow through with his promise to marry her and could divorce her. In those days, a divorced woman could be killed at worst and shunned at best. If her family wasn't willing to take care of her, it meant she would be homeless. There wasn't much mercy, even for the righteous.

Today's Gospel tells us Joseph decided to quietly terminate their engagement in hopes of saving Mary from the worst. We learned this decision was evidence of Joseph's character, that he was good, what the author of Matthew's Gospel called a “righteous” man. That word is thrown around a lot these days, often with the word *self* in front of it, in which case it means someone who thinks they are right at the expense of relationships. But for the author and translators of the Bible the word

“righteous” was a positive word and indicated a person whose heart was “tender towards God” and who lived their life by God’s laws. In other words, a righteous person tried their best to follow God’s ways in every situation. It also indicates Joseph believed in God. Which means, Joseph’s decision to quietly divorce Mary, which still could have put her and her baby in peril, was – at that time - the righteous one to make.

And while Joseph believed in God, he did not believe the woman who was going to be his wife. If Mary had told Joseph her baby was conceived through the Holy Spirit, he didn’t believe her. If that was the case, it makes the beginning of today’s Gospel heartbreaking for both Mary and Joseph.

One of the things I love about God is when God calls us to something new, God will let us say no, even if we say it more than once. But God won’t ever give up asking and calling us.

Which might be why God sent an angel to Joseph. Remember angels are God’s messengers and when angels step into our lives it means God is up to something so new and different there aren’t established plans or rules to help us understand what is going on. Sometimes we just have to trust God and believe, even when things like cultural norms we take for granted are disrupted.

That was essentially the angel’s message. Don’t be afraid to break the societal and religious norm, the angel told Joseph, because that is what marrying Mary entailed. By marrying her, Joseph not only legitimized her and her baby, but he also broke the expectation of what a family is supposed to look like. No more is the man the unquestioned head of the household who does the right thing in all circumstances. What the angel said God was calling Joseph to be a different kind of household where God was the center and he- Joseph- was to support Mary in her calling and to support Jesus in his and they, in turn, would support Joseph in his calling.

Joseph could have walked away. He could have said no again. He could have said that was too hard, too different, too difficult to believe. He could have worried about what his parents would say, or his neighbors, or his customers. A move like that could hurt his business and his place in his small village. He could have been afraid, and that would have been understandable; it’s never easy to live an unconventional life.

Instead, Joseph made the hardest choice: he chose to believe. He chose to believe God and trust God would be with him, no matter



what challenges or hardships his unusual family would meet. Where society expected division and an end of relationship, Joseph chose to make a family. Joseph chose love. Not necessarily the romantic love of the Christmas movies that seem to be everywhere this time of year. He chose God's love that does not shy away from the difficult, that doesn't abandon us when things get

hard or even terrible but stays in it with us. Joseph chose hope instead of despair. Joseph chose love instead of fear. Joseph chose God and in so doing chose a new kind of family.

One commentator observed the family Joseph chose to make must have been a good and healthy one because of how Jesus talked about fathers. In his parables, fathers are mostly positive figures of love, forgiveness, and inclusion, such as in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Jesus even calls God *abba*, a term of endearment rather than authority, that is translated *daddy*. The commentator surmised Jesus must have been heavily influenced by his relationship with Joseph to associate fathers with such tenderness and unconventional roles.

Many of us are aware that much is changing in the world, in our community, in our neighborhood, in churches and families. I often listen to people tell me they feel overwhelmed by the changes or are fearful that the changes might indicate a potential loss in status or prestige. Sometimes they will resort to cynicism, which might feel comforting amidst so much uncertainty. But cynicism only serves to further isolation instead of forming connections or relationships or adapting to the changes. It pushes away instead of making room.

Which is why we will always need people like Joseph from today's Gospel to remind us, the antidote to the harm of cynicism is belief. Not belief in any human system but belief in God. This kind of belief can help us remember changes can indicate God is at work, that God is up to something, creating once again, and calling us to be part of it. Joseph exemplified what it looks like to make room for God in our lives, which is the invitation of the season of Advent and is expressed in the collect we prayed at the beginning of the service. The one that states, at the second coming of Christ, may he find in each of us "a mansion prepared for

himself.”

This doesn't mean we are to build huge, excessively elaborate buildings like the mansions of the rich and famous. It means like Joseph we are to make room in ourselves to receive Christ, by countering cynicism by loving God, and being part of the family where God is the center and we support each other in our callings by sharing what we have, listening, forgiving, and looking for God at work in the world. The love of God creates its own kind of growth, which is how we can end up with something like a mansion inside of us, one that can grow even in times of challenges and changes. And just like God was with Joseph, God is right here with us in every challenge and change in our time.

A sermon by The Rev. Deborah Woolsey, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, 18 December 2022, at The Church of the Good Shepherd, Athens, Ohio.

Source of image: "Solemnity of St Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary" - - From Dominican Friars (England & Wales, Scotland).

Sermon Engagement Question:

What part of Joseph's life resonates with you?

Please include in your prayers

IN OUR WORLD, we pray for Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury, and for Michael, our Presiding Bishop; we pray for peace with justice throughout the Middle East. We pray for the victims of the coronavirus. We pray for all people affected by natural and environmental disasters. We pray for the people who are suffering from war, especially the people of Ukraine, and we pray for all asylum seekers, immigrants and refugees. We pray for Joe our President, Kamala our Vice-President, Mike, our Governor, the Supreme Court and the members of Congress.

IN OUR DIOCESE, we pray for our Provisional Bishop Wayne, the search process for a new bishop, and for Kenneth, Nedi, and Wendell our assisting bishops.

IN OUR PARISH, we pray for Good Shepherd's continued growth, for our

Rector Rev. Deborah Woolsey, for our Associate Priests, Rev. Leslie Flemming, and Rev. David McCoy, for our ministry to students, the university, and the community.

THOSE WHOM OUR PRAYERS ARE REQUESTED: Al S., Bud and Carol, Chris L., Gloria R., Jean R., Miriam, Scott, Sharon, T.C., Ann Carswell, Zelma Coleman, Lee Kembell-Cook, Richard DeNune, Roy DePue, Norm Fox, Lindsey and Regina Golden, Debbie Hunsberger, Bob and Nancy Jackson, Peter Kachenko and family, Ann Lloyd, Jeff Maiden, hristine McGinn, Julie Nehls, Betty Oltorf, Donald Oney, Sandy Oney, Dan and Nancy Reedy, Virginia Richards, Flo and Jack Roach, Michael Vaughn, Mary-Anna Welch, Emily Woolsey and we pray for all who care for them. **

BIRTHDAY: Alex Buckley (12/18), Norm Fox (12/18), Marsha Dutton (12/19), Joanne Larson (12/23)

ALTAR FLOWERS: The Altar flowers are given to the glory of God and in honor of my Mother, Ann Wedig by Lois Wagner

** Full names are normally not published online. However for the Sunday 10:30 service we will publish full names unless requested otherwise. If you have a name to be added to the prayer list, Lynn Graham maintains this information. Lynn may be reached at **740-593-5098** or grahammowery@aol.com.

At-Home Worship

Christ Church Cathedral Cincinnati live streams its services Sundays at 10 a.m. These are saved and can be watched anytime later.

<https://cincinnati.cathedral.com/ccj/join-online/>

Washington D C -- there's much to explore at the the National Cathedral's online portal. <https://cathedral.org/worship/>

Coming up on the Calendar

Saturday, December 24, 7:00 p.m. - - Christmas Eve (Preservice rehearsal

for Christmas Eve will be at 6:00 p.m. on December 24. Prelude music will begin at 6:45 p.m.)

Sunday, December 25, 10:30 - - Holy Eucharist (Christmas Day)

Wednesday, December 28, 9:30 a.m. - - IHop for Christmas breakfast celebration

Notes & Announcements (additional items in the Friday Bulletin)



Christmas Services

Please join us in celebrating the joyful birth of our savior.

Christmas Eve 7:00 pm December 24

Christmas Day 10:30 am December 25

Both services include Holy Eucharist.

Looking Ahead to New Year's Day

January 1 falls on a Sunday next year, which means we have the opportunity to observe a celebration in the church called Holy Name Day. This feast day is held eight days after Christmas Day to honor Luke 2:21 *After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

Please join us in person or online to celebrate this special day in the church and to remember the significance of his name.

Sunday, January 1, 2023 10:30 am Worship Service

Christmas Poinsettias

Once again, the Altar Guild will place large poinsettias only on the altar for the Christmas season. If you would like to contribute to that fund, checks can be made out to Good



Shepherd with "Christmas poinsettias" on the memo line. If you wish to honor someone with either a memorial or a thanksgiving, please get those names to Barbara Martin (barbara@chogs.org) before **December 20**. Thanks from the Altar Guild.

For Bishop Transition News and Updates

[-- Follow this link --](#)

If you want to help the folks who have been negatively impacted by climate disaster and war anywhere in the world (including Ukraine) please consider contributing to [Episcopal Relief and Development \(ERD\)](#) which is the official ministry of the Episcopal Church.



It seems the melting wax on this candle in the Advent Wreath today looks like a shepherd's hook. That may be a message? Not?



This morning Mother Nature offered up a snowy reminder that winter is still in the supply pipeline.



Contacts, Information

[Quick Links](#)

[Pandemic Notes:](#)

[Parish website](#)

[Sermons](#)

[Parish calendar](#)

[Staff](#)

[Campus Interest](#)

[E-News Guidelines
and Back Issues](#)

[Diocese Southern Ohio](#)

[Bishop Transition](#)

[\[E\]Connections](#)

[Episcopal News Service](#)

[Episcopal Journal & Café](#)

[Link to the DSO guidelines
for in-person worship](#)

In light of local conditions we request all persons wear masks inside the church building **regardless** of vaccination status.

Office Hours: 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday. Masks are required.

The **Church Building** is not open for public meetings and gatherings but during office hours the thrift shop and chapel are available for individuals. Masks are required.

CrossRoads Café is temporarily closed.

Contact Information

For pastoral needs, please contact The Rev. Deborah Woolsey at 937-689-8895 (cell) or 740-593-6877 (church), or by e-mail at revdebwoolsey@gmail.com.

To find out more about Good Shepherd and other matters, please contact Alex Buckley, Senior Warden, at 740-593-5513 or by e-mail at macbuck@yahoo.com.

For maintenance matters, please leave a note at the office or contact Dana Carlson, Junior Warden, at 740-664-

[DONATE to Good Shepherd](#)

The above takes you to the Parish page where you can find instructions or donate on-line via PayPal, If you have a preference, please indicate on the the "Add special instructions to the seller" section the purpose of the donation -- e.g. organ fund, plate collection, etc.

2022 or by e-mail at
carlsondana@hotmail.com.

For emergencies, please call
The Rev. Deborah Woolsey at
937-689-8895.

NON-emergency messages
can be left on the church's
answering machine (740-593-
6877).

The parish office
administrator is Barbara
Martin (740-593-6877) or
barbara@chogs.org.

The Episcopal Church of the
Good Shepherd, 64 University
Terrace, Athens OH 45701

740-593-6877
chogs@chogs.org
www.chogs.org

Check out the
Church's
[YouTube](#)
[Channel](#).

LIKE us on Facebook
[Episcopal Church of](#)
[the Good Shepherd](#)
[45701](#)

Office Hours:
Masks are required.

10:00 am - 2:00 pm
Monday - Thursday
740-593-6877
chogs@chogs.org

Blessings !

Church of the Good Shepherd | 64 University Terrace, Athens, OH 45701

[Unsubscribe foster.theodore@gmail.com](mailto:foster.theodore@gmail.com)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by foster.theodore@gmail.com powered by



Try email marketing for free today!