



## Praying the Scripture at Home 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent ~ 22<sup>nd</sup> December

1. **Breathing exercise:** Try to do this at least once a day. Be still. To start take three deep breaths... inhale for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four (*all through your nose, which adds a natural resistance to the breath*). Then, close your eyes and focus on your normal breathing. On the in-breath be aware that it is life-giving, nurturing; a gift from God. On the out-breath be aware that you are feeding the plants and trees around you; you are blessing the world around you. Stay with that for a while: The in-breath as a gift from God; the out-breath as your gift to the world. Repeat the following: *Come, Lord Jesus, my Joy rests in you*", for as long as you are comfortable and be aware of the God whose love envelops you.
2. **Opening Prayer** - God, the living word, we ask that we may be aware of the power of your word speaking in our lives. We ask your spirit to come among us and light the fire of your love in our hearts. As we gather to explore this word for ourselves and each other we do so in an atmosphere of openness and respect for all gathered here and for your presence among us. AMEN
3. Read **Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 1:18-24)**. Read it a few times – come back to it again over the next few days. *Is there something about the story that maybe you never noticed before? Is there a word, phrase, idea that strikes you? In the stillness repeat that word or phrase in your mind. Stay with this for a few moments and let its meaning sink into your heart.*

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.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.

- Is there something that puzzles or disturbs you? Why? -What does it ask of you?
- Everything is possible to God. Where have you seen God at work in your own life?
- Not all decisions are black and white, there are many where we will be misunderstood no matter what choice we make. Think of one such decision. What guided you? Where did you place your trust?
- What change does this passage call you to today? What is the Good News you proclaim?
- What is the hope you find in this passage? How can you bring this to others?

#### 4. Consider this

It was once said "there has been only one Christmas. The rest are anniversaries." It's a time for keeping the memory of God's greatest gift alive in our hearts... In recent years many people have expressed concern that Christmas has drifted far from its religious roots. We have also witnessed an attack on religious displays in public places while watching the corporate world hijack the Christmas celebration as an excuse to sell their latest wares. Massive traffic jams, packed shopping malls, and lines stretching around the block have become hallmarks of today's Christmas activities. Ad campaigns for holiday sales can lead to pandemonium as shoppers are knocked down and trampled in their frantic efforts to buy the latest gadget. However, I suggest this is a good time to reflect upon the distinction between what we want and what we need or what we give instead of what we get.

The true value of a gift isn't necessarily measured by its price tag. In fact some of the most precious gifts cost nothing at all... and can be life changing. Many people simply need to be loved, listened to, or appreciated. Some gifts, such as taking time to listen to someone who is hurting emotionally or giving a word of encouragement, can make a tremendous difference in a person's life and bring joy to the giver. This holiday season consider how our community would be affected if everyone looked for opportunities to give someone a life-changing gift for Christmas. As Helen Steiner Rice wrote; "Bless us Lord, this Christmas, with quietness of mind; teach us to be patient and always to be kind." May we receive this most precious of gifts ourselves and be that gift for others!

**5. Closing Prayer** - Lord, in these last few days of Advent, let my heart be touched by your gift of love and my life be your witness. Thank you for the gift of your scriptures. And on Christmas day may I pray with joy and confidence, 'Come Lord Jesus Come.' I ask this through Christ Jesus our Lord, your Son who lives and reigns with you in the unity of Holy Spirit, **Amen**