

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 7: 10-16

Matthew 1: 18-25

### STICK A FORK IN ME...I'M DONE!

I don't know about y'all and this time of year. But...**Stick a fork in me...I'm done!** I'm ready for the pressure of feeling I still need to buy MORE to be replaced by the Peace of "No More Gifts!" I'm ready for Advent to be over and for Christmas to be here. My Christmas Sermon's been done for two weeks! But, I gotta wait ANOTHER 72 hours to give it! And, I am **REALLY** ready for Advent music to be pau and to sing Christmas Carols like EVERYBODY ELSE IN THE WORLD...EVERYBODY! I mean, **STICK A FORK IN ME...I'M DONE!**

HOWEVER...you know what? It's not that easy, it never is...not in Church seasons and not in life. We are right now in the middle of the "Time Between." We cannot get away from our Episcopal heritage or from our responsibilities to each other. Well, actually, we could.

But, THAT WOULDN'T BE ANY FUN! All we have to do is just say that "Time Between" doesn't mean anything.

This is, after all, exactly what Ahaz does. Through Isaiah God offers him the greatest gift possible: *Ask me for ANYTHING and I'll give it to you.*" Ahaz can't make the difficult step of trusting God and having Faith that God will be with him. So, God takes care of it by having Isaiah tell Ahaz that God will send a sign: a young girl shall bear a son who will be named "Emmanuel"...**GOD WITH US**...who will usher in a time of peace and safety. A time when Judah's enemies will find themselves desolate. Ahaz can't get out of his "Time Between"; he cannot hear God; and, thus, his "Time Between" becomes a return to his "normal" fears. Perhaps it's that this all happens in the light of day, when Ahaz is surrounded by fears and threats which he sees and which are manifested in Isaiah. Who knows, at any rate, **Stick a fork in him, he's done!**

Joseph, on the other hand, having already found himself in his own "Time Between" has, within himself, begun moving into a state of Grace. Doing what is Just and Gracious moves him beyond the "Time Between" Law and Compassion. You see, Joseph, having found Mary, his betrothed, pregnant has two clear options under Deuteronomic Law (22: 23-38): He can end the Betrothal and send Mary back to her family which will publicly shame not only Mary but also her entire family; or, he can have Mary stoned to death "in the doorway of her father's house." You see, the Betrothal is the contractual first step between Joseph and Mary's father. Marriage is the second and concluding step. Mary's pregnancy has abrogated the first and has the probability of negating the second. **Stick a fork in her; she's done.**

But wait, look what Joseph does...he determines to send her away "quietly:" NO public shaming and NO stoning. (Seems reminiscent of Jesus and Mary Magdalene!) He shows compassion and grace to her against all cultural and societal norms and expectations. **Stick a fork in HIM...He's done!**

It is after this decision, while Joseph is asleep...while he is in that "Time Between" wakefulness and sleeping...between the harsh light of day and the mysticism of sleep...when distance between God and him is at its thinnest...that the angel of the Lord comes to Joseph. Just as God offers Ahaz an unimaginable gift, so She offers one to Joseph: "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife for the child conceived...is from the Holy Spirit." Even more, "name him Jesus for he will save his people." How will Joseph respond? How will he deal with his "Time Between," that time when God has spoken to him, reminding him of the covenant of Love and Compassion between God and the people?

As we know, unlike his direct ancestor Ahaz, Joseph **hears** God in his **heart** and "did as the angel commanded him; and took her as his wife." Joseph's **Faith and Trust** enables him to **HEAR** God, the **Faith and Trust** to **LISTEN** to God; and, most importantly, the **Faith and Trust** to **ACT** as God has asked...moving beyond the "Time Between" with all its "here and now" and what others expect and, truth be told, how he convinces himself to act. And, because Joseph ACTS, we, 2000 years later continue to enjoy the gift of "God with us," of knowing "God saves us."

All of us have our "Time Between." We have them in health issues, in doubts about our faith, in fears about political polarization. Our "Time Between" when we cannot get away from the 24/7 news cycle, from desperate concerns about

family and friends. Our agony over choices others make even as we see the cliff before them. It can almost seem as if we live only in 'Time Between.'

Yet, just as with Joseph, **God comes to us**. God comes as a hymn...yes, even an Advent one! God comes to us when we see those on the Life's margins and are moved to help them. God thins the distance between Herself and us when we open our hearts to the fears and concerns of a friend. God sends angels to us all the time...children, laughter, sunsets, and sunrises, the movement of the ocean, and, most deeply, when we share the body and blood of Jesus in Community and in Love.

Like Joseph, all we need to do, what we are asked by God to do, is to open our hearts, allow ourselves to hear God, and to ACT in Faith and Trust. That's not much...STICK A FORK IN ME, I'M DONE!

But...look what's on the other side of our "Times Between": "God with us" and God Saves" are not simply names. They are the promises of the ACTS of a loving, forgiving, and gracious God. Like Joseph, as we hear and listen, "Do not be afraid" will take us hand-in-hand with God into Time Eternal.

So, let's continue to prepare faithfully and prayerfully over the next **60 hours** until we can "come and worship" our newborn King with "Joy to the World" and singing with "Angels o'er the realms of Glory" the amazing gift Joseph has given to us: the gift of God's presence and God's saving grace found in Jesus.