

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Advent

During Advent and Lenten Confessions I'll often hand out holy cards with a prayer on the back for people to pray as their penance. Well this year, I found a beautiful image of St. Joseph holding the Christ Child, with the Blessed Mother stretching out her hands to receive Jesus from his arms. This is a beautiful image for us to consider as we are about to receive the newborn Savior more deeply in our hearts on Christmas. It's also a beautiful reflection on the Gospel passage we just heard – the Annunciation – when the Virgin Mary opened, not just her womb, but her very heart and her entire life to receive Jesus. So, since you're getting two homilies for the price of one this year (kind of), I thought I'd do something a little different. I'd like to offer a guided meditation for us to more fully imagine the event we heard in the Gospel.

So, I invite you to go ahead and close your eyes. Relax. Feel yourself just letting go of everything. There will be time to do all you still have to do yet. Just be present right now, right here.

Breathe in. And hold. Breathe out. Breath in. And hold. Breathe out.

Let go, and totally relax.

Now imagine the following event, which you see unfold before your eyes. There is a young woman busy doing her housework. She's engaged to be married. Picture this in your mind. See her doing those chores. Imagine how's she's thinking about her wedding day, humming as she goes along.

Then suddenly you feel a presence. It's hard to describe; but this young woman feels it too. You're not afraid, but calm and at peace. *Be with this feeling.*

"Greetings Mary," you hear from a distance! The young woman turns around to see who's there. Seeing something outside, she leaves the house to investigate. The voice continues: "Hail, you who are full of grace. Do not be afraid, for the Lord is with you. You have found favor with God." *Listen to these words. Repeat them in your mind. What do they mean? Could this be the voice of an angel? Am I really worthy to have found such favor with God that His angel visits me?*

Then you hear the archangel Gabriel proclaim these words: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus." Knowing that she is not yet married, you hear Mary respond: "But, how can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And before she can even try to fathom the answer, the angel says to her in reply: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...This child will be the Son of God". *Be with these words. "The Son of God"! Her! Really?!*

And, although you know she already believes, but would truly find comfort and confirmation in some kind of miraculous sign, the angel tells her about her relative, Elizabeth, who in her old age has conceived and is now in her sixth month of pregnancy. Indeed “nothing will be impossible for God”, Gabriel declares! *How does that truth make you feel – that nothing is impossible for God? What would that mean for Mary? What does that mean for you?*

In light of such a bold statement, a response of faith is sought – from both Mary and from you. Together you say, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” *Repeat those words to yourself:* “I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” What do those words mean for your life? What does Jesus want to tell you as you agree to do His will? *Breathe in – “let it be done”. Breath out – “to me”. Breathe in – “let it be done”. Breath out – “to me”.*

Now, slowly come back to this place. God is still within you. He is Emmanuel, “God with us”. And in the holy Eucharist He also becomes “God within us”! Thank you, Jesus. *Now slowly open your eyes.* God bless you.