

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

We are almost there! We are a week away for the celebration of Christmas! The readings this weekend point out the change of focus – from a general readiness for the Coming of the Lord, to the immediate preparation for His coming as a Baby in the Manger. The Gospel today tells us of the Annunciation of the Angel to St. Joseph in a dream. Joseph is struggling with what to do, how to respond to this news of Mary's pregnancy. The Angel comes and gives him the direction God wants for him – he is to take Mary into his home. This is Good News for us, as we struggle through the darkness of our lives. Even when we don't know the way to turn or "which way is up," if we take Mary into our "homes" – into our hearts, our decision making, our families, our lives – she will bring the Presence of God, she will bring Jesus to us. I encourage you to bring Mary into your home today so that the light may overcome all of the darkness we feel and experience.

St. Matthew then quotes from Isaiah:

***Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel
which means "God is with us."*** (Matthew 1:23)

Jesus' coming as a Baby in the manger is a reminder that *God IS with us*. He is not with us because we deserve it. He is not with us because we somehow have earned His Presence among us. He is not with us because He finds us more pleasing than the other people out there. He is with us because He loves us, because we are the weakest, the most broken of His children, and He desires to heal us and bring us back to Himself. This reminds me of Pope Francis' comment about the Church being a field hospital – we are all desperately in need of healing by God! This is Good News! This means that, as Jesus said to one mystic, "**I did not come to you because you were worthy. I won't leave you because you are not.**" Jesus desires to be with us, even when we don't live up to His expectations – or our own. This means God chooses to come and be among us in our brokenness and woundedness. He is not scandalized by our weakness. God comes to us, He comes among us, He IS EMMANUEL so that we may come to Him.

So, the question then becomes, if God isn't afraid of our littleness, what is keep Him from us, or us from Him? *Sin*. Of course God came to destroy sin and death, and it cannot conquer God, but we can *allow* it to conquer us. Sin is like a stake in the ground that keeps us from running to God. The coming of Jesus is like giving us a hacksaw, if you will, to cut the chain. Before Jesus came, we never had access to that hacksaw – we *had* to stay where we were in our sin, fettered to the ground by this stake. Now, Jesus has come, and given us the opportunity to be free. The question is whether we want freedom or not. Do we really want to be free from sin? Do we trust that freedom from addiction, freedom from attachment, freedom from sin is really worth what it's made to be? God truly wants us to be free, but we have to choose it. We have to choose His incredible and freeing love more than the immediacy of the pleasure or comfort of our sin. Do we truly want to be free?

Jesus became one of us so that we could be free. He came into our humanity so that we would not be afraid of the God who seemed so scary – telling us to step out of our comfort into the unknown territory of holiness. He became small so that we could not ever say that God in His power does not understand our weakness. He came so that He could be close to us, even when we didn't want to be close to Him.

Let us ask *Emmanuel*, let us ask our *God with us*, to give us the courage to let Jesus break the chains of sin and shame that hold us bound, so that we may run into His loving arms. Let us ask Mary to come into our homes, our hearts, that she may bring us the Presence of God-with-us.