

Reflection Questions

- What challenges, if any, are you experiencing during the holidays?
- What changes have you made in your approach to seasonal expectations and family relationships along your recovery journey?
- How can you be of service to those you love this Christmas?

Have a Blessed and Merry Christmas!

May God bless you and those you love as we celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. There are a number of seasonal articles that relate to addiction recovery and the holidays on catholicinrecovery.com. A few practical ideas while approaching Christmas:

- Attend plenty of meetings
- Stay in touch with other group members
- Establish and maintain personal boundaries

Sunday Mass Readings This Week

1st Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

2nd Reading: Romans 1:1-7

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-24

4th Sunday of Advent



The hope and peace of our Lord awaits us as we approach the fourth and final Sunday of Advent. We are also in the midst of the winter holidays, which can be an unusually difficult time for those in recovery. Cultural expectations, heightened family tension, or a general sense of loss and loneliness may impact the way we feel and behave this time of year.

The gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus depict plenty of confusion during the first Christmas, which may bring us comfort as we expect perfection for ourselves. This Sunday's Gospel Reading notes the challenges involved in the engagement between Mary and Joseph. Joseph becomes aware that Mary is pregnant and plans to divorce her quietly in order to keep her from being publicly shamed. As is often the case for us, fear seems to be guiding Joseph's actions. Therefore, when an angel appears to him in a dream, the angel's first words are, "Do not be afraid."

We hear the details of Joseph's awakening to God's plan for him:

The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.

For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.

She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us."

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

Mary learns that she is pregnant with the Messiah and abandons herself to God's will. As part of the angel's message to Mary, she has also learned that Elizabeth is six months pregnant and she proceeds in haste to be of service to her older relative. She does not travel for the mere sake of curiosity or to discover if the angel is really telling the truth. Instead, she sets out to uncover more of God's mystery and to do His will. Similarly, Joseph serves his wife with the same motivation.

As we have been given peace and new life from the addictions and unhealthy attachments which once dominated us, we can set out to do the same. In addition to insuring immunity from acting out, service to others helps us stay close to the true meaning of Advent and Christmas. We are surrounded by cultural attitudes which cleverly assure us that Christmas is about getting things. Underneath this belief runs a current of scarcity which reminds us of all that we do not have.

When we are committed to understanding our role in the greater context of God's kingdom, we find grace and blessings in abundance. Just as Joseph and Mary each came to understand their roles in the story of salvation, we are awoken to our part in the same story. We might seek to pray alongside Mary as we proclaim the words, "May it be done to me according to Your word."

The more we offer ourselves to the process of recovery, the more meaning we will find in our lives. When our recovery is overlapped with the sacramental life of our faith, we get to know Jesus in an intimate and personal way.

We may be inclined to share glad tidings with those we encounter in the coming days as we turn to God for inspiration and hope. We have been offered a priceless gift of peace and freedom and find joy in the experience of sharing it with others.