



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

700 King Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8P 1C7

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Children's Liturgy of the Word

The readings for the Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A focus on the imminent arrival of Christ at Christmas, highlighting the virginal conception, the fulfillment of prophecy, Joseph's obedient faith, and God's intimate presence as Emmanuel ("God with us"). They converge on the mystery of the Incarnation, shifting from Advent's call to conversion to contemplation of Jesus' birth.¹

Isaiah challenges Ahaz to ask for a sign, stating it could be anything as "deep as the netherworld or as high as the sky." However, Ahaz refuses, expressing that he does not want to "tempt" God. This response may reflect faithfulness, or it could indicate his fear of what the sign might reveal. Nonetheless, God provides the sign regardless.

Ahaz serves as a contrast to Joseph, who exemplifies pure openness and attentiveness to God's revelations, even in a dream. When Joseph awakens, he immediately follows the angel's command. Ahaz's situation demonstrates that we cannot prevent God's revelations, which are constantly occurring in our daily lives. To recognize them, we simply need to be attentive and open, just as Joseph was.²

Do we dare?

The readings prepare us for Christmas by revealing how God enters history literally "with us," inviting trust like Joseph's amid mystery.

¹ Homiletic Directory, 96

² Adapted from Ponder: Contemplative Bible Study, Year A, Mahri Leonard-Fleckman

Background

Isaiah 7:10-14 presents King Ahaz with a sign of God's deliverance: ³ A young woman (interpreted by the Church as a virgin) will conceive and bear a son named Emmanuel. This prophecy, given around 734 BC, serves as a foreshadowing of the greater reality of God's Son becoming flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit. ⁴

Psalms 24 proclaims that God owns all creation and asks, "Who can ascend the Lord's holy hill?" The answer is that those who can are the ones with clean hands and a pure heart, who seek God's presence sincerely and without deceit. This psalm calls the faithful to prepare themselves spiritually in order to encounter Emmanuel.

Romans 1:1-7 introduces Paul as an apostle of the gospel promised through the prophets. This gospel focuses on God's Son, a descendant of David by human lineage, declared the Son of God through resurrection. It highlights the significance of faith and obedience among all nations, linking Old Testament promises to Christ's lineage. Ahaz is part of David's line as a king of Judah.

Matthew 1:18-24 After the marriage contract between Joseph and Mary's families, but before Joseph brings Mary into his home, we see Joseph described as a righteous man. He follows Jewish law and decides not to shame Mary publicly. Unlike Luke 1:26-38, where the angel speaks to Mary, it is Joseph who receives a message from the angel. In the Bible, divine beings often share news about special births or the futures of unborn children. Typically, these messages are directed at women, and men often question or misunderstand them. However, this is not true for Joseph. When the angel visits him, he learns that the child's name will be Jesus, which means "Yahweh is salvation." This part of the Gospel connects back to the prophecies of Isaiah, suggesting that Jesus gives new meaning to the messages of Isaiah. ⁵

³ God's deliverance is God's promised rescue of Judah from its immediate enemies—the kings of Israel (Ephraim) and Aram (Syria)—who threatened King Ahaz around 734 BC.

⁴ Homiletic Directory, 101

⁵ Adapted from Ponder: Contemplative Bible Study, Year A, Mahri Leonard-Fleckman

The Liturgy

Procession from the main Church

After the opening prayer, when all are seated, the leaders come forward and stand facing the altar.

Priest: (in these or similar words)

We gather today to celebrate the fourth week of Advent, reflecting on Jesus who is soon-to-arrive. Go with your leaders to listen to the readings and learn about ways to prepare for Jesus.

Once most of the children have formed a procession, the leader with the book proceeds to the celebration site. The second leader usually walks behind the children. Upon arrival at the CLoW room, the leader places the book on the prepared table.

Welcome.

The leaders assist the children in sitting and preparing. **Begin with the Sign of the Cross.** Help the children think and connect their actions as they touch their foreheads, shoulders, and stomachs. The leader may offer the following prayer, in these or similar words.

Lord God, you give us you as we await the birth of your Son, Jesus. Fill us with happiness and peace as we prepare for the birth of Jesus.

Amen. Invite the children to listen to the readings. Proclaiming all the readings is unnecessary; however, the Gospel is required.

READINGS

Isaiah 7.10-14

FIRST READING

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah.

The Lord spoke to Ahaz, ⁶

"Ask a sign of the Lord your God;
let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven."

But Ahaz said, "I will not ask,
and I will not put the Lord to the test." ⁷

Then Isaiah said:

"Hear then, O house of David!

Is it too little for you to weary the people,
that you weary my God also?

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. ⁸

Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son,
and shall name him Immanuel." ⁹

The word of the Lord.

A period of silence is observed after the reading.

⁶ Son and successor of Jotham, king of Judah, came to the throne about B.C. 734. James Hastings et al., Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 17.

⁷ Ahaz prefers to depend upon the might of Assyria rather than the might of God. Catherine Upchurch, Irene Nowell, and Ronald D. Witherup, eds. Little Rock Catholic Study Bible, Revised Edition (Little Rock, AR: Little Rock Scripture Study, 2011), 1434.

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 24.1-2, 3-4ab, 5-6

R. May the Lord come in; he is king of glory

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the river. **R.**

Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
Someone who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up their souls to what is false. **R.**

The person will receive blessing from the Lord,
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. **R.**

SECOND READING

Romans 1.1-7

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans.

From Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ,
called to be an apostle,
set apart for the Gospel of God,
which God promised beforehand
through his prophets in the holy scriptures:
the Gospel concerning his Son,
who was descended from David ¹⁰ according to the flesh
and was declared to be Son of God with power
according to the spirit of holiness
by resurrection from the dead,
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Through Christ, we have received grace and apostleship
to bring about the obedience of faith
among all the Gentiles ¹¹ for the sake of his name,
including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.
To all God's beloved in Rome,
who are called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word of the Lord.

A period of silence is observed after the reading.

¹⁰ The first king to unite Israel and Judah and the first to receive the promise of a royal messiah in his line. David was pictured as the ideal king of God's people. He ruled from about 1005 to 965 B.C. Chad Brand et al., eds., "David," in Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 391.

¹¹ Gentiles are persons of non-Jewish descent—or more broadly, anyone outside the covenant community of God's people. John D. Barry et al., Faithlife Study Bible (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016).

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

The birth of Jesus the Christ 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 ¹² 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 ¹³ 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."
All this took place
to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:¹⁴
"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"
which means, "God is with us."
When Joseph awoke from sleep,
he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him;
he took her as his wife.

The Gospel of the Lord.

¹² Righteousness is the conformity or obedience to a standard or obligation that is normally understood to be morally good, such that the expectations and requirements of a relationship toward God and neighbour are satisfied. Garwood P. Anderson, "Righteousness," in Lexham Theological Wordbook, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

¹³ References to this figure usually occur when something dramatic and meaningful is about to happen, generally with serious consequences, either good or ill, for God's people. James M. Efird, "Angel of the Lord," in The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated), ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 31.

¹⁴ Isaiah 7.10-14

REIMAGINED READINGS FOR CHILDREN

The reimagined readings below are intended for use after the children have heard the original reading. The intent is to allow the children to hear the original reading and help them better understand it (not replace it).

Read at a minimum, the Gospel, which has the highest priority, and then ask the children to sit down. You can then read the reimagined reading. Leaders may not have time to read all of the reading. If time permits, after the Gospel, proclaim the Psalm, and then the first reading, if time permits.

Reimagined readers must always remain faithful to the original Scripture's intent, making it age-appropriate for children to understand.

First Reading

We will now listen to our first reading again, but in a different way.

A long time ago, in a kingdom full of worry and kings who didn't always listen to God, there was a king named Ahaz. His land was in trouble—two other kings from nearby wanted to take control of it, and it scared everyone. So, God sent the prophet Isaiah to speak to Ahaz and said, 'Ask for a sign, and I will help you.' You can ask anything you want, something as big as the sky or as deep as a secret cave?

But Ahaz shook his head. "No. I won't ask God for a sign. I don't want to test God." He was too proud or too afraid to trust God fully.

Isaiah said that God was saying, "Okay. God isn't done. God will give you an awesome sign anyway!"

And then, "Look! A special young woman—pure and chosen by God—will give birth to a baby boy. She'll name him Emmanuel, which means 'God with us.' He will save all people just like God promised.

Responsorial Psalm

We will now listen to the Responsorial Psalm again, but in a different way.

R. May the Lord come in glory

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the river. **R.**

Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
Someone who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up their souls to what is false. **R.**

Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. **R.**

Second Reading

We will now listen to the second reading again, but in a different way.

A farmer planted a field with seeds.

He watered them and waited for the sun and rain to nurture them and make them grow.

It took time, but the farmer did not give up.

Be patient, like that farmer.

Don't let your heart and soul become tired.

Nurture it like the farmer.

Gospel

We will now listen to a reading from the Gospel again, but in a different way.

Two thousand years ago, in Nazareth, Israel, a holy man named Joseph was planning to marry Mary. Both of them loved God very much.

One day, Joseph found out that Mary was going to have a baby. How could that be? They weren't married yet, and Joseph knew that the baby didn't belong to him. He was confused. He didn't want to get Mary in trouble, so he decided to break up with her quietly.

As Joseph slept that night, an angel from God spoke to him in a dream. The angel told him not to be afraid to marry Mary because her baby was from the Holy Spirit. Joseph woke up and knew it was from God. He knew what to do. He went to Mary, married her, and took great care of her and the baby growing inside her.

Reflection

The leader may offer this reflection in these or similar words. Remember the amount of time available to return to the main assembly. The leader may wish to reduce the number of questions. An excellent place to begin is the question:

What did you hear? Allow children to respond.

A king named Ahaz was worried. God says, "Ask for a sign—something super big or super deep!" But Ahaz says no. So God gives a huge sign anyway: "Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel." That's like God whispering, "Don't worry—I'm sending help, and I'll be with you!"

If you were Ahaz, what sign would you ask God for?

Why do you think God gave a baby as the sign?

Now the best part—the Christmas story starts! Mary is going to have baby Jesus from the Holy Spirit, but Joseph doesn't know yet. He's a good man and plans to be kind in a quiet manner. Then an angel visits in a dream: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid... She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."... 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means, 'God is with us.'" Joseph wakes up, obeys, and takes Mary as his wife. No more fear—just trust! This matches Isaiah's promise perfectly. God keeps His word!

Joseph was scared but obeyed the angel.

Have you ever been scared to do the right thing?

What helped?

Pretend you're Joseph—what would you say to the angel?

All these stories shout: God is coming to live with us! Like Joseph, we can say yes to God's plan. Clean your hands and heart and watch for God's signs. Christmas isn't just about presents—it's about Jesus, our Emmanuel, saving us and staying close to us forever.

How will you get ready for Jesus this Christmas?

Make a "Yes to God" list:

One thing to do, one to say sorry for, one kindness.

Following the reflection, the prayer leader invites everyone to stand to profess their faith. Recite the Creed or use the sample below to ask the children to respond.

Alternative Reflection

The leader may offer this reflection in these or similar words. Remember the amount of time available to return to the main assembly. The leader may wish to reduce the number of questions. An excellent place to begin is the question:

What did you hear? Allow children to respond.

A long time ago, in a big kingdom full of worries, there was a king named Ahaz. His enemies were coming closer, like storm clouds on a playground. God wanted to help, so He sent a message through His friend Isaiah: "Hey Ahaz, ask Me for a sign! Something as big as the sky or as deep as the ocean—anything to show I'm with you!"

But Ahaz crossed his arms and said, "No way, I won't test God." God smiled anyway and gave the best sign ever: "Look, a young woman will have a special baby boy. She'll name him Emmanuel—which means 'God with us'! He'll show everyone I'm right here, helping." Ahaz scratched his head, but the promise sparkled like a star.

If you were Ahaz, what sign would you pick?

Fast-forward many years... to a quiet carpenter's shop. Joseph was fixing a wooden table, humming a tune. He was going to marry Mary, but uh-oh—she was going to have a baby! And not just any baby... a holy baby from God Himself! Joseph felt confused and sad, like when you lose your favourite toy. He decided to be gentle and let her go quietly, without anyone being the wiser.

That night, Joseph dreamed! A bright angel flew down like a superhero: "Joseph, don't be scared! Take Mary as your wife. The baby is from the Holy Spirit. Name him Jesus, because He'll save everyone from bad stuff. Remember that old promise? 'Look, the virgin will have a son called Emmanuel—God with us!' It's happening now!"

Pretend you're Joseph in the dream—what do you say to the angel?

Joseph woke up! He hugged Mary and said, "Yes, God! We're in!" They got ready for the baby, knowing God kept His magic promise. Little Jesus would come, God living with us forever, bringing love, hugs, and no more fears.

How does "God with us" make your day brighter?

Following the reflection, the prayer leader invites everyone to stand to profess their faith. Recite the Creed or use the sample below to ask the children to respond.

The Creed

Depending on the time, a simple profession of faith may be made (see below).

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth?

All: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who gave his life for us?

All: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts and gives us everlasting life?

All: I believe.

Leader: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it.

Prayer of the Faithful

Leaders may begin the intercessions by announcing the needs they know. The leader may need to repeat and paraphrase the petition, concluding it with the cue for the response: 'We pray.' All respond to each petition by saying, "Lord, hear our prayer." Sample intercessions are below.

The intercessions are said. The Leader introduces them, and an assistant announces them.

The leader says:

Let us ask God to help us as we wait for Jesus. After each prayer, please respond: 'Come, Lord Jesus.' R: Come, Lord Jesus.

Assistant:

For our Church family, that we say "yes" to Jesus like Joseph did, and share His love with everyone. We pray to the Lord. R:

Assistant:

For our families at home, that we welcome Jesus like Mary and Joseph, especially in friends who need help. We pray to the Lord. R:

Assistant:

For children and grown-ups who are hungry, sick, lonely, or worried, that baby Jesus brings them cozy comfort and strong hearts. We pray to the Lord. R:

Assistant:

For all of us, that we may prepare our hearts for Jesus by being kind and joyful. We pray to the Lord. R:

Assistant:

In the quiet of our hearts, we offer our own prayers... [pause] We pray: Come, Lord Jesus. R:

The Leader says:

Loving God, thank You for Your promise! Help us wait for Jesus with big smiles. Come be with us always, like Emmanuel. We ask this through Jesus. Amen.

Return to the church

Ask the children to return to the main assembly. Ask them to return quietly and think about what they have heard and are now doing. Be mindful of children having difficulty finding their families.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT: PEACE & JOSEPH'S GOOD NEWS!

**JESUS
IS THE
LIGHT!**



**PEACE ON
EARTH,
GOODWILL
TOWARDS
ALL.**

JOSEPH AND THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE

Joseph was
worried
about
Mary.



Joseph listened
to God!
He married Mary
and welcomed
Jesus with JOY!



THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS!



Sharing a toy

Helping us



Spread HOPE, LOVE, JOY, & PEACE!
Be Kind and Helpful like Jesus!

JESUS IS THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL!



Praying

Singing together

♥ HAVE A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS! ☆ JESUS LOVES YOU! ♥

Readings: Lectionary Sundays and Solemnities,
Canadian Conferences of Catholic Bishops, 2009, adapted for children.
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