

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

'She will bear a son.'

+INJ+

There are few emotions more terrible, more heart-wrenching, than the feeling that one has been betrayed. There are stories of parents who forgive thieves who robbed their shops at gunpoint. There are stories of people who have forgiven those who beat them down on the streets. There are even stories of parents forgiving the murderers of their children.

These things happen, as God gives them grace.

But Caesar never forgave Brutus, nor America Benedict Arnold, nor the husband his adulterous wife. Even the Law of Moses and Christ himself allow divorce in the case of adultery. Betrayal, treason, turning away from the thing you once loved; this is not forgiven. After all, is this not what apostasy is, that is, giving up the faith? We may think from our point of view that it is merely our own mental lack of conviction about certain doctrines that priests and their churches opine about; but that idea already assumes that the lack of conviction, the unfaithfulness, is correct. If it is not correct, and there is a God and a people of God, then it is nothing but betrayal of the Lord one once loved, and treachery toward the Church one once claimed to serve. It is faithlessness, in the same sense as when we talk about an unfaithful spouse.

Now Joseph knows his wife has been unfaithful to him, an adulteress, Mary, not the saint we call her, but the sinner he saw. I say he knew, or at least, he knew as best he could, because only one case has been recorded of a woman becoming pregnant without the assistance of a man. He cannot be blamed for not knowing that this one case was of his own wife, Mary, the mother of God.

Yet he is not angry. He does not wish for Mary to be punished, even with death,

which was the law at the time. Rather, he decides to *put her away quietly*.

In our riches and feigned altruism, we might ask, 'why divorce her at all?' We say this because we have become accustomed to accepting many evil things. Joseph was not someone who accepted evil; he did not accept the breaking of the sixth commandment, '*thou shalt not commit adultery*.' Yet he was merciful. He would not see a young girl, probably no older than fourteen, be killed for her sin.

But an angel comes to him in the night, and says simply: '*take Mary as your wife*.'

Mary, the daughter of Anna, would become Mary, the wife of Joseph. And having given birth to Jesus, she would become Mary, the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, and would be remembered forever as Mary the Mother of God.

In this Advent season, we venerate and sing about and praise Holy Mary, who gave birth to the Christ child in a stable, who nursed the Messiah with her own body, who fled to Egypt to guard Him from those who would destroy His flesh. Indeed, this Advent, we are all as Mary, for unto all of us a *child is born*, in this world, in our life, in our creche, in our hearts.

But who is like unto Joseph? Who is like unto the father that condemns sin but offers mercy?

There is a saying, 'Like father, like son.'

For the child born on Christmas day shall not be like sinful men who either vengefully destroy the vicious, or believe themselves so sophisticated that they can make a vice a virtue. Like his earthly father Joseph, He shall condemn the sin of the world. Like his earthly father, He shall *put it away quietly*.

The sin He shall damn in His own flesh upon the cross, bleeding for every fault of man. And in His descent into hell, He will separate Himself and all the sin he bares from the mass of humanity. A divorce of sorts, yet a divorce where He Himself has become the adulterer by taking on human weakness.

And like his earthly father, He shall return to the fallen, and marry them in His resurrection and Ascension, through the work of His Church. Indeed, every baptism is a marriage, between the Father and an adulterer, between Joseph and Mary.

Like father, like son, and Christ is indeed like His earthly father Joseph. He takes after His old man, who takes after the Ancient of Days, who happens to be the true Father of Christ, *who is in heaven*.

All these things Joseph did in faith, in trust, in loyalty *to his God and our God, to his Father and our Father*, that Holy Mary might conceive *by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin, and bear a son*.

And bear a son she did.

'And Joseph called his name Jesus.'

+INJ+

Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 7:10-17; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25.