

The Virginal Conception and Immanuel (God with Us) 4th Sunday of Advent (Year A)

Isaiah 7:10-14—the *Almah* Shall Conceive

1. The Lord invites King Ahaz: ask for a “sign” “as deep as Sheol” or “high as heaven”
2. The “Virgin/Young Woman” (Hebrew *ha 'almah*) shall conceive
 - a. *'Almah* = English “maiden” (implies virginity, not used for married woman)
 - b. Example: Rebekah is a “maiden” “no man had known” (Gen 24:43)
3. She shall bear a “son”: his name shall be Immanuel (Hebrew, “God with us”)

Psalm 24—Let the Lord enter, He is the King of Glory

1. Context: psalm of Royal Coming of a King into his City (cf. v. 7-10)
2. Who Shall Enter the Temple? “Clean hands” and a “pure heart” = free from sin (v. 3-4)
3. God will bless those who “seek the face of the God of Jacob” (v. 6)

Romans 1:1-7—Descended from David and Divine Son of God

1. The “good news” (Greek *euangelion*) of God: promised by the prophets
2. The gospel: Davidic Messiah *and* Glorified Son of God
3. Universal Call to Holiness: all are “called to be saints” (Greek *hagioi*)

Matthew 1:18-24—The Birth of Jesus Christ

1. Virginal Conception: Mary is with child “of the Holy Spirit”
 - a. Mary and Joseph are “betrothed” (legally married; ≠ modern ‘engagement’)
 - b. Before they “came together” = that is, lived together
2. The Message of the Angel: reaffirms virginal conception of Jesus
 - a. Jesus: for “he will save his people” from their sins
 - b. *Yeshua*: Aramaic for “The LORD saves”
3. Fulfillment of Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14
4. Benedict XVI: “The passage about the virgin... is *a word in waiting*.” (vol. 3 p. 50)

The Living Tradition

1. Why does Joseph’s decide to Divorce Mary? (See *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*, p. 8)
2. Suspicion: Joseph follows law (Deut 24:1-4) (St. Augustine)
3. Reverence: he considers himself unworthy (St. Thomas Aquinas)
4. Perplexity: he does so quietly, because he does not suspect her (St. Jerome)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

1. Virginal Conception: “divine work that surpasses all human understanding” (CCC 497)
2. The “fulfillment of the divine promise given through Isaiah” in Isa 7:14 (CCC 497)
3. Virgin Birth: neither “legends” nor “pagan mythology” (CCC 498)
4. Non-believers: treated virginal conception with “mockery” & “opposition” (CCC 498)
5. What is the *reason* for the Virgin Birth?
 - a. Divine Nature: “Jesus has *only God* as Father”; he is “naturally Son” of Father

- b. Human Nature: Jesus is “naturally son of his mother”
- c. New Adam: “who inaugurates the new creation” (CCC 504)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (4th Sunday of Advent, Year A)

1. Go back and reread the entire chapter in Isaiah 7. List which elements of the prophecy seem to only have been fulfilled by Jesus, and which seem to reflect the time of Isaiah himself.

2. Have you ever struggled with belief in the virginal conception of Jesus? If so, what were your reasons? Read the Catechism’s explanation of the virginal motherhood of Mary in CCC 502-507. Which of the reasons given by the Catechism helps you best to understand the virginal conception?

For Further Reading in the Catechism

- 1. Catechism: the Virginal Conception of Jesus (CCC 484-511)
- 2. John Paul II, *On the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph* (available www.vatican.va)