

## FROM FR. MARK:

During Advent, our attention is drawn to the Virgin Mary. We honor her as the one who gave birth to our Lord on Christmas Day, there are several other Marian Feast Days during this time, The Presentation of Mary in the Temple, The Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Advent is also an invitation to pondering the life and witness of St. Joseph. Although there are no spoken words of St. Joseph recorded in Scripture, there is an abundance of wisdom to glean from his life.

There are three themes from the life of St. Joseph that carry us into the new liturgical year as we begin Advent. These themes are: Waiting, invitation, and accompaniment.

**Waiting:** Waiting is a daily aspect of life. We wait for the red light to turn green. We wait for crops to grow. We wait for an answer or reply from a friend. There are many ways we wait every day. Waiting can be a source of frustration but waiting can also be formative to aid patience. Waiting is particularly formative when we are waiting on the Lord. In prayer, many petitions, questions, and requests are offered. Sometimes these prayers are expressed calmly and sometimes with a pleading heart. We believe the Lord hears AND answers all of our prayers, but most often we are led to wait for the answer.

Scripture frequently calls us to wait. "Wait for the Lord, take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the Lord!" (Psalm 27:14). St. Joseph waited for the Lord to reveal His plan multiple times. After learning Mary was with child and later when the Holy Family was in Egypt, Joseph waited for the Lord's instructions. Joseph's life shows that waiting requires patience and humility. He also shows that waiting brings joy. Joseph's life witnesses to the words of the Psalmist, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and I hope for his word" (130:5).

**Invitation:** Much of our waiting in life is done waiting for an invitation to join an event, a group of people, a team, or a social outing. We wait for another person to extend an invitation to us. An invitation tells us we are valued, important, or included. Our Lord also works through invitations. He extends invitations to us on a daily basis. Beautiful aspects of nature — a sunrise or sunset, leaves changing colors, the first snowfall of the season — are invitations to contemplate God's creativity and design in the world. Reminders to attend Sunday Mass and frequent the Sacrament of Confession are also invitations from the Lord that speak of his desire to draw close to us and heal us. St. Joseph received many invitations from the Lord. Some of these were to take Mary and Jesus to a certain town. Some invitations did not reveal all that would unfold. In responding to the Lord's invitations, Joseph needed what Pope Francis called "creative courage" (Patris Corde, 5). Joseph acted promptly in response to the Lord's invitations, but he also had to make decisions to provide or bring a solution as he led the Holy Family. In the final verses of Scripture we read, "The Spirit and the bride say 'Come.' Let the hearer say, 'Come.'" (Revelation 22:17). When the Lord invites us to come to him, our response is the same: Come, Lord Jesus! This exchange of invitation and openness allows for the creative courage of St. Joseph to flourish in each of us.

**Accompaniment:** Throughout life, various people journey alongside us to help us along the way. Parents, siblings, friends, a spouse, a teacher or mentor, a priest or spiritual director. Reflection helps us identify the growth in our lives that took place as someone accompanied us for a time. To accompany another person requires an investment of time, courage, and oftentimes patience. Walking alongside another and witnessing their growth is one of life's most rewarding experiences — well worth every effort or sacrifice that is required. During Advent, we often reflect on Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem. By that point, Joseph has chosen to accompany Mary as they together follow the Lord's invitation. Joseph is present to respond to the needs of Mary and Jesus. He courageously fulfills his vocation as the husband of Mary and earthly father of Jesus. He accepts them both with his whole heart and trusts in the Lord. He walks with them as long as the Lord allowed him to. We, too, are called to accompany others — to invest in other people and to build relationships with them. "Joseph's attitude encourages us to accept and welcome others as they are, without exception, and to show special concern for the weak" (Patris Corde, 4). Welcoming another person and accepting them where they are at provides the foundation for an open and trusting relationship. To do this, one must listen without preconceived judgments. Over time, the relationship grows allowing for deeper conversations and room for the Lord to work in both people.

This Advent, taking some time to reflect on these themes — waiting, invitation, and accompaniment — may reveal opportunities for prayer, invitations to respond to or invitations to extend, or people God is calling you to accompany more intentionally.