

Advent 4

December 21, 2025



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Joseph could hardly place a good construction upon her condition. Had Joseph wished to follow the letter of the law he would have denounced her and she would have been stoned. Joseph had nothing to go by save the Word of God and he accepted it.

A godless man would have said it was just a dream, but Joseph believed the word of God and took unto him his wife.

– Martin Luther –
(Christmas Book)

Isaiah 7: 10–17

One of the struggles of believers is discerning how to make our requests known to God without “testing” God. King Ahaz dealt with this problem as well. Even when the Lord specifically told him to ask for a sign, Ahaz could not bring himself to do it. His ideas about proper piety got in the way of actual obedience. He was so sure he knew the proper way to relate to God that, even when faced with God’s direct command, he thought he knew better. An exasperated Isaiah informs Ahaz that despite his disobedience, God would be providing a sign: a child called Immanuel will be the sign they have been waiting for.

- Have you ever found it difficult to ask God for what you want?
- Have you ever let your own ideas about how to be religious put you at odds with God’s Word?

Little could King Ahaz have imagined, in the midst of his disbelief, that God’s promised sign of Immanuel would be fulfilled so many years later. Both Paul and Matthew clearly identify Jesus as the promised Messiah through references to his lineage and the prophet’s words. In making this connection we are reminded both of the miraculous fulfillment of Immanuel – God with us – and of the fact that God always fulfills his promises. Even though we may not be able to imagine how or when, God is always true to his word.

- Have you ever experienced a prayer being answered long after the time which you spoke your need to God?
- Had you forgotten your prayer and then realized it had been answered, or did you notice right away?

Psalms 24

“Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in,” the Psalmist writes. A king of glory is exactly what people were looking for in a Messiah. They expected one who would enter the gates of Jerusalem as a hero, ready to rule with strength as well as mercy. And this is not so different than what we still look for or expect of God. Dramatic displays of power are appealing to us. We think they would assure us of God’s presence. But when the king of glory finally showed up, it was in a way no one was looking for at all, a helpless child, born in a stable. God is showing us something new in him.

- How does God put in front of us the things that we have yet to consider?
- How is God the one who seeks us, rather than us seeking him?

Romans 1: 1–7

Paul begins his letter to the Romans with a clear opening statement about what he is doing and who he serves. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ. And Jesus, Paul assures us, is the Messiah promised of old, through the prophets, and delivered through the house of David. Paul is a servant of this Messiah. As believers, we, like Paul, are set apart from others by virtue of our baptismal call. Paul understands himself to be set apart by God for a particular mission, that being the proclamation of the good news.

- If each of us is set apart for our own special purpose in God’s kingdom, then what does that say to us concerning our human tendency to worry about what others are doing?

As we draw near to the nativity of our Lord, we see prime examples of God calling certain people to specific tasks, setting them apart to do his will in the world: Zechariah, John, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph. We may not be called to be a prophet who cries out in the wilderness, or to become the mother of God, but we are called to bear witness to the kingdom of God in our own unique ways.

- How do you work for the kingdom of God in your own life using your unique gifts and abilities?

Matthew 1: 18–25

Joseph had every right under the law to publicly disgrace Mary when he found out that she was pregnant and knew the child could not be his. Matthew says that he was a “just” man. He was righteous according to the law. This means that he was one who followed the Torah faithfully. However, he also did not want to shame her or have her stoned to death, so he decided to send her off quietly with a divorce. (In this time engagement had the same legal binding as marriage.) Even in the face of what he presumed was a betrayal, Joseph was inclined to show mercy to his betrothed.

But God, himself, intervened, changing Joseph’s plans. He sent a messenger to assure Joseph that Mary had not betrayed him. Rather, the child she was carrying belonged to God. Joseph and Mary were being called to raise up God in the flesh in their home.

- Do you think this message was difficult for Joseph to believe? Do you think he would have believed it if only Mary had told him, and not a messenger sent from God?
- How has God used others in your life to change your mind about something that was really important?