

The 4th Sunday of Advent Reflection by Angelina Rossi, Parishoner

Marjorie Holmes, a Christian novel author, wrote a wildly popular and best-selling trilogy of books on the life of Jesus in the early 1970s. A favorite Sacred Scripture teacher of mine once said she would read the first book, "Two From Galilee", each Advent because it brought to life, although academically inaccurate, the love story between Mary and Joseph and set an imaginative stage for the birth of Jesus. In the Gospel reading this final week of Advent, Matthew retells the account of Jesus' birth story from the perspective of Joseph but leaves me wondering and imagining how hard it was to carry the burden of being the earthly father to the Messiah.

Deep in the pages of Marjorie's imagination I found a Joseph who agonized from loss of sleep as he contemplated what to do with the woman he loved fiercely, the woman betrothed but not yet married, who was with child. Not his child. Trying to keep busy with building their house, his mind would vacillate between staying with or divorcing her quietly so that she would not be stoned to death as was the custom for women committing adultery in that time. Flipping through the pages, the story brought to life the real and dire consequences of not choosing the right path and what immense burden stood on his shoulders.

Likewise, in the first reading of Isaiah, Ahaz, King of Judah was being counseled to join a coalition against Assyria in the North while others, namely the prophet Isaiah, were telling him to wait. Ahaz himself, was leaning toward conciliation with Assyria in hopes of saving himself and Judah. Such decisions to make, with such great consequences of life or death! Ahaz most likely was feeling the great burden on his shoulders too.

And finally, in Paul's letter to the Romans, a Church that he had yet to visit in person, lays out for them who he is, an *Eved Ivri*, a slave for Christ Jesus. Such a servant who must spend his life trying to pay off a debt, a joyful burden they must learn to carry.

With all this burden carrying, each were pointed in the same direction, from the angel in Joseph's dream to Isaiah's prophecy to Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus. *Do not fear, for that which is conceived in Mary is indeed of the Holy Spirit, and you shall call him Emmanuel! God is with us!*

Emmanuel is a sign to the people that God will continue to be with his people then and now! With great burdens, bring great Blessings!