

Living Grace

Cycle A 4th Sunday
of Advent

"A WISH BRINGS NEW LIFE INTO THE WORLD"



Long ago, "in a place so far north that the mothers never pack away the wool hats or mittens", a brave little girl named Anja wished to be one of Santa's elves. After she leaves a note for her family and helps her elderly neighbor prepare for the holiday, she straps on her skis and heads out into the snowy landscape. From a red bird to a polar bear to a reindeer, and a whole a menagerie of winter animals, Anja finds all the help she needs along the way. Through the power of her wish, and her own fortitude, strength, and perseverance, she fulfills her wish in a mystical, magical land.



THE SPIRIT OF DETROIT

Sculpture by Marshall Fredericks ~ 1958

Coleman A. Young Municipal Center ~ Detroit, Michigan

EXPLORING THE ART:

This monumental sculpture includes a large seated figure holding a sphere emanating rays to symbolize God. The Spirit of Detroit is a large, bronze monument that represents the city of Detroit, featuring a large seated human figure holding a family and golden orb aloft in its hands. In 1955, Marshall Fredericks was commissioned by the Detroit-Wayne Joint Building Authority to create a sculpture for the city to represent hope, progress, and the "spirit of man." The bronze was cast in Oslo, Norway, and covered with acid to oxidize the metal, giving it a green hue. When work was complete, the statue was wrapped in protective fabric, surrounded by a supportive framework and loaded face down onto a German freighter for its journey from Oslo to Detroit. The statue's left hand grips a gilded sphere emanating rays that symbolizes divinity, while its right hand holds a family, which symbolizes all human relationships. Fredericks sought a consensus from representatives of several different religious groups when designing the divine aspect of the work. On the wall behind the sculpture the inscription from 2 Corinthians 3:17 reads: "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," along with the seals of both the City of Detroit and Wayne County. The inscribed plaque in front of the statue reads: "The artist expresses the concept that God, through the spirit of man, is manifested in the family, the noblest human relationship."

THE NOBLEST HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

Living Grace

READ-ALoud STORY



ABIDE IN ME

Vicki Shuck, Esperanza Arts

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

~ John 7:7-9

Read-aloud video link:

THE CHRISTMAS WISH

Written by Lori Evert, Photographs by Per Breiehagen

Sunday Gospel

MATTHEW 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.
When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,
but before they lived together,
she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.
Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man,
yet unwilling to expose her to shame,
decided to divorce her quietly.
Such was his intention when, behold,
the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,
"Joseph, son of David,
do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.
For it is through the Holy Spirit
that this child has been conceived in her.
She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins."
All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,
which means "God is with us."

**When Joseph awoke,
he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him
and took his wife into his home.**

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

THE POWER OF A WISH, AND COMPANIONS ON A JOURNEY, BRING THE LOVE OF GOD ALIVE IN THE WORLD.

Here on the 4th Sunday of Advent we are introduced to Mary and Joseph's incredible journey. It is almost impossible to imagine what Mary must have felt like to be called by God to this very significant journey. Mary woke up one day and the Angel Gabriel appeared to her asking for her consent to be the one to fulfill God's "wish" to restore a broken world through Jesus. Mary's famous response was, "Be it done unto me according to your will." Sometimes in life BELIEF is all we have to lean into. For Joseph too, his belief in God's wish to save the world, changed the trajectory of his whole life, as his new mission would be to support and protect the lives of his Holy Family.

What is so amazing about a wish, much like a pregnancy, is that new life energy grows within a person. The life force that is generated in a wish, is a lot like new life that is being formed in the womb. The baby being formed will come into the world as a brand-new person. The world never will be the same because of this new person. A wish has a parallel kind of power. In our children's story, Anja's journey filled her heart with wonder and enchantment. Anja exhibited fortitude, strength, and perseverance to bring her wish to fulfillment. Through the power of her wish, she came into a mystical, magical land, and she encountered the help she needed all along the way. Anja's incredible belief led her from companion to companion as she was aided in her fulfillment of her wish. Mary was given many worthy companions to help her along the way - the most important one being Joseph, as he stayed by her side through it all.

In the Gospel readings of the Christmas season, we follow the many characters that Mary and Joseph encounter on their journey to bringing God's wish in Jesus to life. Many of these characters are helpful, and many are challenging, and try to block their journey along the way. In many ways, we find ourselves in the same situation today. We will meet some people along the way who will help and some who will try to block us on our journey to follow God's wish for our lives.

God had an idea in mind when he created each one of us, and he has put a great wish in each of our hearts. Each of us must listen to and discern God's grace in our lives. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we can trust that our wishes will lead us to be the person that God created us to be. Then we strive to be like Mary and Joseph, and to consent to God's will for our lives. Our consent allows the life of God to grow within us. And like Mary, God's life in each one of us is not meant just to serve ourselves, but to bring the redeeming grace of God's Spirit into the world. If this is true, BELIEF is the most important work we can do. As God was with Mary and Joseph, God is waiting for you to discern his wish for your life. Then his dream for the world will come true through you!

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: What is the first thing you ever remember wishing for? Is Christmas a time for wishing? In all of our wishes, what is it that we are really seeking? Within your deepest wish, what do you think you are really seeking?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: What was it that initiated Anya's journey? Who came to help her on the way? What drew her to them? What was the outcome?

THE GOSPEL STORY: Do you think it would have been hard for Joseph to believe the angel? Could Mary have made her incredible journey on her own? How did her openness and willingness bring God more fully into the world?

What does this mean for us? What can we learn from Mary and from Anja this Christmas season? Do you have a wish this Christmas season? Can your wish birth more of God's love and presence into the world? When are you going to get started? Who do you need to support you on your journey? What do you need to bring with you?

Biblical Background

MATTHEW 1:18-24

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: The main character of the Matthew account of this story is the foster father of Jesus, Joseph, who we meet in Nazareth. Nazareth is a ridge top village well known for its role in political insurrection. It seems that many revolts against the Roman military overlords originated in Nazareth. Recall that Nathaniel, a friend of the disciple Phillip exclaimed, "Nazareth, can anything good come out of Nazareth?" This was a reference to the hot bed of sedition that the village had acquired. Recall that it is the synagogue in Nazareth that ran Jesus out of town as he began his public ministry. They did not like the sermon he delivered that day, because it was not "angry" enough and did not include a condemnation of the Romans.

TERMS: Righteous Man From this phrase we know that Joseph lived his life according to the teachings of the Hebrew Bible, his good works were evident to all, and he was a man of honor in the local community. Knowing the Law of the Jews well enough, he knew that he would have to divorce himself from his betrothed when he learned that she was with child and that he certainly was not the father! He determined to come up with a solution over the course of time that would allow him to receive counsel and insight from local religious leaders and the Lord through prayer. In the Gospel of Luke, we know that Mary is informed that her cousin, Elizabeth, is with child and is in her sixth month. Joseph must have taken this information to heart and found a way to buy some time for prayerful reflection. Thus, he sent Mary to visit Elizabeth in a small village about five miles outside of Jerusalem. While she was away, he would have time to take his concerns to the Lord and find direction for the future.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: The angel of the Annunciation, Gabriel, who appeared to Mary, also appears to Joseph. This time in a dream, which has given rise to the belief that he was an older man than Mary. In the prophet Joel, we read that in the last days, or the days leading up to the appearance of the Messiah, young men will see visions and old men will dream dreams. Joseph is directed by God in a dream while in a deep sleep, which leads to the deduction that he is a man of advanced age, much older than Mary. Tradition also tells us that he dies before the public ministry of Jesus begins since he is not mentioned after that, but we do not know for sure.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: Matthew records the basics of the birth narrative that Luke will later develop in a much more detailed account in his Gospel. The name that Mary is to call God's son is "Jesus" and means that "God will save us". After he is born, another name he is given is Emmanuel to declare his presence in our world, and means that "God is with us."

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: Do you have a special wish for this Christmas? How might you step forward in ways to make it come true? Who do you need to help you?

GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: BEING WHOLEHEARTED
SURRENDERING TO BELIEF

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Make a Christmas Wish jar for your family. Have each person their Christmas Wish write on a piece of pretty colored paper. Keep the jar in a central place in your home, and pray for each other's and the wishes. The last day of the Christmas season is the Feast of the Epiphany (when the we celebrate the three wise men's arrival to meet the baby Jesus) on January 6th. Together share, how in small and big ways, you saw your wish beginning to come true!