

Invitation to Trust Fourth Sunday of Advent/A December 22, 2013 9:00 AM
Is 7:10-14; Rom 1:1-7; **Mt 1:18-24** (Justice and peace are really the fruit of faith.
Shalom comes through people surrendering themselves to God.)

Today's liturgy gives us two different examples of handling **the invitation of God to trust**. In the first case, **Ahaz** turns God down, has no intention of trusting him. In the second case, **Joseph** decides to trust in God.

In the first case we have to realize exactly what it is the prophet wanted Ahaz to do. He wanted him to give up his alliances, his military alliances, with his allies and depend totally on God for his protection. And Ahaz thought that was crazy, as would anyone in the Pentagon or in Washington DC or for that matter in most of our homes. **We don't believe in trusting in God for our protection—do we?** We are not there yet, but that's the plan. Eventually, what Isaiah is saying, is **peace will only come to earth when people trust in God**. However, we look at a world—we see something different. We see strength and power and force and what it can do. So **we believe that our ideas, are ideals, our way of life can only prevail if we are strong enough**, if we are the strongest player on the field. And we believe that committing oneself to God as the only source of peace is the work of a rare saint, and well that may be. We are not there yet. But now question yourself: Is our way really working? **Is trusting on strength and power really working?** So is the way of the saint to be emulated or only admired? That is the question presented by this reading from Isaiah.

The reading from the gospel presents a different point of view: that of Joseph who is asked to, again, depend totally on God and, in fact, is informed not by a prophet, but by a dream. Now it would be very easy to dismiss a dream as, well, a dream, a fantasy, a phantasm. But **Joseph chose to listen to the message of this dream** and to take Mary into his home, a woman who was pregnant before they came together, a woman who had a child he knew was not his. Joseph was neither a daredevil nor a coward, but **he did accept risk**. He risked his own happiness and the integrity of his own family on this message from God. Scripture says nothing of him other than he was a just man. But justice is very inclusive because it involves the order that God intends for the world. Human society is not really able on its own to establish justice or peace. **Justice and peace are really the fruit of faith**, the fruit of grace. They are gifts—the great gift the Jews believed in and wanted, the gift of

shalom, an active peaceful reign of justice. It doesn't just come about automatically. **It comes through people surrendering themselves to God.**

The whole Christmas story is that **God has come to us in the person of Jesus** precisely to bring us that fruit, precisely to bring us that grace, precisely to show us what it means to surrender to God. And we know as believers in Christ we are supposed to carry on the work he began. We have just begun, and we have to keep in mind we have just begun. We have not quite totally accepted it ourselves, and that's all right. God accepts us as we are even though we don't accept God completely. So that's **our first agenda to open ourselves more to this great confidence and trust that God would like us to accept.**

Secondly, if we do—if we do—then we can share it with others. If we don't, we can't share it. We can't share what we don't have. **But insofar as we can learn, perhaps in small steps, to trust in God, then we can share that trust with others.** We need to keep in mind that this work of Christ is, as I said, only at its very beginning stages. So as we approach the festivities of Christmas, we have to keep in mind that **the world still waits**—the world still waits—for the longings of their hearts to find expression and fulfillment, the very longing expressed by the prophets of olden times, the longings that are still with much of the world. And as Christians, as believers, as followers of Christ we have to remember that **Christmas is only a beginning. There's much yet to be done.**