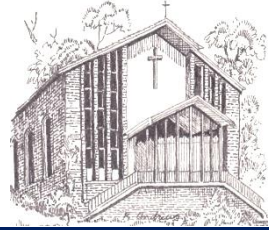




Welcome to the Parish of St Michael Thirroul and Wombarra



21 / 22 DECEMBER 2019
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ANVENT  **YEAR A**

Vinnies Christmas Appeal – Thank you!

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

An Inner Assurance

A dream changed Joseph's life and ours. A mere dream, like what we have at night. How trustworthy could this be?

And yet the safety of Mary and the child Jesus depended on it. In his dream (gospel), an angel told him that Mary's pregnancy was from the Holy Spirit of God. Mary had accepted readily but without really understanding. This angel of the Lord told him in the dream that he should not be afraid of the pregnancy, even though he was not yet married to this woman.



Not be afraid? Already everyone could see that Joseph's fiancé was "in a family way." Western culture might applaud this fact, as it does when movie stars have children with whomever they please whenever they please. In Biblical culture marriage was a sacred act [and not too long ago in our own], a participation in God's own fidelity. It seemed that Mary had broken with that fidelity, at least as far as the townspeople could see. The Blessed Mother a public sinner! No wonder Joseph was making arrangements for a "quiet divorce."

So why in the world would Joseph reverse himself and trust a dream? Do you trust dreams? Someone had a dream about a kangaroo sitting on the roof in a rocking chair smoking a pipe! Should that person check the roof for rocking chairs or pipe smoke, just in case? Of course not. We take a dream for what it is, a mechanism of our psyche that somehow processes our experience but does not give us literal truth. We do not usually rely on them for life-changing messages.

Joseph did. Why? The answer has to do with something St. Ignatius of Loyola calls "discernment."

In general, discernment is an examination of one's internal reactions ("movements of spirit"), especially in prayer. Of course, there are many different movements, but there is one that may describe Joseph's dream: sometimes, rarely, grace is so gently strong that the person praying has an inner assurance that the experience did not come from imagination but from God. Somehow it is impossible to doubt it.

We have to be careful not to get carried away by this notion. Probably many of us could convince ourselves that God or an angel spoke to us this morning. But we need to "discern" which experiences are from God and which are not. Are they quiet? Do they lead toward God or away? What is the long-term result? A spiritual director could help us sort through such questions.



Joseph's dream might have entailed a movement of this kind. It contained—not a kangaroo, but—a quiet certainty of the presence of God. No doubts followed it, though they would surely seem warranted. Joseph's dream was like the face of mother to a child. Home. It was like the voice of a close friend.

Joseph did not experience his faith as broken into, shattered or pulled to pieces by the dream. Instead the message fitted right into the design of Joseph's life with God.

And so he followed.

What is your internal sense of the Christmas story? Is the birth of God an impossible tale reserved for children? Or do you find the roots of trust within yourself as Joseph did?

The gospel readings of the coming year come from Matthew. Today's reading, concerning

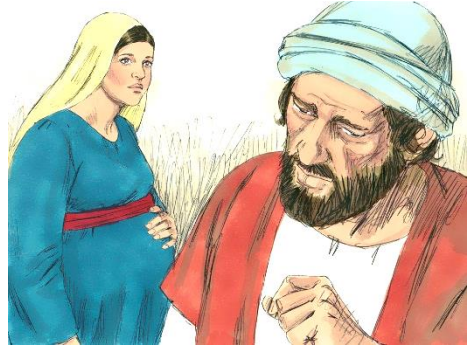
'how Jesus Christ came to be born', expresses the faith in the Incarnation of the community for which Matthew wrote. This community of Jewish Christians were anxious to persuade those with whom they had shared the traditions of Israel to believe in Christ as the 'fulfilment' of 'the Law and the prophets' (Matthew 5:17).

Whereas, the more familiar story of Christ's birth, in Luke's gospel, is centred on Mary, the mother of the Saviour, Matthew's account – so remarkable in its accord is essentials with Luke's account – is told from the point of view of Joseph, the one who was destined to be the foster father of the Saviour. It is through Joseph that the Davidic lineage of the child to be born – so important in the hopes of Israel – is proclaimed. Finding his betrothed to be with child, Joseph 'being a righteous man' considered divorcing her quietly. Some scholars see profound significance in Matthew's reference to 'righteousness' [= right relationships, justice — i.e. fidelity to the traditions of Israel]: the implication that before the divine mystery that confronted him – probably through his being informed by Mary – Joseph's first reaction was a sense of unworthiness. His reluctance was only overcome by a divine call that led him to take up the immense responsibility that was to be his.

As in Luke's account, Mary's virginal conception is clearly affirmed. Her son is not only to be 'a descendant of David', as our reading from Romans declares, but also the Son of God, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit – something that our reading from Romans declares will be made manifest to the whole world 'through his resurrections from the dead'. Matthew also cites the words of Isaiah, 'the virgin shall conceive'. The prophet's prediction, in fact, was that Ahaz the king was to be given a sign from God in the coming birth of a son. (There are about a dozen of these 'all this was to fulfil' citations in Matthew's gospel. They are not technical interpretations of the texts cited, but expressions – in the spirit of the rabbinical traditions – of the conviction that Christian faith's reading of the Old Testament recognises the 'fulfilment' of old Israel's hopes.)

The Davidic Messiah announced to Joseph in his dream is far more than a liberator from Roman occupation. His name, Jesus, – which means 'God saves' – points to his role as the Saviour. 'Saving the people from their sins', he will fulfil the true destiny of Israel, as the people chosen to bring the whole world to share in God's final blessings.

Telling of his coming as 'Emmanuel' – a name that means 'God is with us' – Matthew invites the Jewish people to recognise that the great theme of divine presence, running through the Scriptures, 'I will be your God; and you will be my people', has found a realisation beyond all their imagining. In fact, Matthew's gospel will close with the same theme from the mouth of Jesus himself: 'I am with you always; yes, to the end of time'.



VINNIES CHRISTMAS APPEAL

Thanks to you for your generosity and thanks to Vinnies for their ministry! Over the last few weekends **\$7,400** was donated! Amazing result! Thank you!

You gifts of hampers, toys, non-perishable items and gifts have provided joy to many families and individuals in our local area. On Monday, Vinnies members prepared the parcels for distribution before Christmas. **Thank you for your generosity!**



Across NSW, almost seven percent of families with children under the age of 15 report that they have run out of food in the last 12 months, and have been unable to afford to buy more. In rural areas and amongst the Indigenous population, food insecurity is even more common. Families can experience food insecurity for a range of reasons. For many households, food is the only item in the household budget over which they have some control. Families prioritise paying the rent, and paying bills such as gas and electricity. They then use what little remains to buy the weekly groceries. But too often, their budget falls short of what they need. Many households on low incomes have no choice but to live in less expensive locations far from shops and services. They then incur a 'poverty penalty' when forced to pay for transport, or to purchase food at more expensive prices from a local convenience store. Other families cannot afford a refrigerator, meaning they cannot buy in bulk, but must purchase small amounts of food at a time. In some parts of the State, groceries – and particularly fresh food – are prohibitively expensive for families on low incomes. Whatever the factors that contribute to food insecurity, the impact is always cause for concern.

CHRISTMAS LITURGY TIMES AT THIRROUL 2019

- Christmas Eve School Grounds 6:30pm Tuesday 24 December
- Christmas Eve Wombarra 9:30pm Tuesday 24 December
- Christmas Day Thirroul 9:00am Wednesday 25 December

Boxing Day [Thursday, 26 December] to New Year's Day [1 January], Mass times will be as usual. On Mondays, there will be no Liturgy of the Word at Wombarra all during January. *See the weekly schedule on the bottom of page 4.*

SOCIAL JUSTICE

“Amongst the poor you have found a privileged place to encounter Christ. This is a precious gift in the life of the follower of Christ: to receive the gift of encountering him among the victims and the poor. The encounter with Christ among his beloved ones refines our faith.”
– Pope Francis, 7 November 2019

CHRISTMAS MASSES – WHAT TO BRING



To all the Christmas Masses, all are welcome to **bring a bell** to ring during the appropriate times. If you are coming to the **6:30pm Christmas Eve Mass**, **bring a chair** – and children are encouraged to **dress as angles/shepherds** etc. At all Masses there will be a special collection which will be used during 2020 for people in need in Australia or elsewhere – **bring your money with you.** The **2018 Christmas Collection**, some **\$5,000** was given in total to the Vinnies NSW Bushfire Appeal. Your Christmas donation will be given in total and in full to people in need in Australia or elsewhere during 2020.

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK AND BEYOND

Monday	23 Dec	Preparations for Christmas
Tuesday	24 Dec	4:00pm Setting up in School grounds
		6:30pm Christmas Eve Mass in School
		9:30pm Christmas Eve Mass Wombarra
Wednesday	25 Dec	9:00am Christmas Day Mass Thirroul
Thursday	26 Dec	9:00am Feast of St Stephen, first martyr
Friday	27 Dec	9:30am Feast of St John, apostle
Saturday	28 Dec	————— Feast of the Holy Innocents, martyrs
		5:30pm Feast of the Holy Family
Sunday	29 Dec	8:00am Feast of the Holy Family
Monday	30 Dec	————— No Liturgy at Wombarra
Tuesday	31 Dec	5:30pm New Year's Eve Mass
Wednesday	1 Jan	9:00am Feast of Mary, Mother of God
		World Day of Peace
Thursday	2 Jan	9:00am St Basil the Great
		St Gregory Nazianzen



SWIM BETWEEN THE FLAGS

Please be safe on our beaches and waterways. So far, since 1 July 2019, there have already been **1,089** rescues – that's **281** since last week! Please be safe on our beaches. What type of rips are there?? **FLAG SWIM FLAG**



CAN YOU HELP?? WE NEED YOU ... CHRISTMAS EVE

On Tuesday, Christmas Eve at 4:00pm we need many helpers to set up for the Christmas Eve Mass in the Parish School grounds. Just turn up to the church — to carry items up to the school ... or to the school to help set up things there.

THIS Sunday's Readings *on our website*

Fourth Sunday of Advent • Year **A**
 1st Reading Isaiah 7:10-14
 2nd Reading Romans 1:1-7
 Gospel Matthew 1:18-24

NEXT Sunday's Readings *on our website*

Feast of the Holy Family • Year **A**
 1st Reading Sirach 3:2-6,12-14
 2nd Reading Colossians 3:12-21
 Gospel Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

SUNDAY MASS TIMES

Church of St Michael • Thirroul
 Saturday – 5:30pm • Sunday – 8:00am
 Bulli • Sunday 8:30am and 5:30pm
 Corrimal • Saturday 6pm, Sunday 9:30am

LITURGIES THIS WEEK

Wombarra [*Liturgy*] Monday 4:30pm
 Thirroul Tuesday 5:30pm
 Wednesday 9:00am
 Thursday 9:00am
 Friday 9:30am

Parish of St Michael – Thirroul and Wombarra

Moving forward as a Parish Family + one of the Northern Illawarra Parishes

Patrick Vaughan • *Parish Priest* ❖ Andrew Granc ofm, Geoff Allen, Ken Cafe ofm • *Assisting*

📍 325 Lawrence Hargrave Drive
 ☎ 4268 1910 📠 4268 1976

📧 PO Box 44 • Thirroul 2515

💻 thirroul@dow.org.au

Parish Office Hours Tuesday, Wednesday Friday

9:00am to 3:30pm Magda Pires
 10:00am to 3:00pm Maureen Franciskovic

🌐 www.thirroulcatholic.org.au Parish School of St Michael ☎ 4267 2560