

4th Sunday of Advent

***Christmas: Past, Present and Future Reflection* Compiled By Dick Ullrich**

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What Christmas season would be complete without a recount of Charles Dickens' timeless classic, *A Christmas Carol*? Though, as Catholics, we do not believe in the ghosts of Past, Present, and Future, the Holy Spirit does reach out to us in this same timetable. So let us pause to consider the miracle described in Matthew 1:18-25. This miracle of the Holy Spirit is all about Divine intervention as it manifests itself in the olden-times, today, and in the days to come.

Brought about through the cooperation of Joseph and Mary over two-thousand years ago, this Divine intervention was proclaimed by Isaiah, "Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Emmanuel."

This Gospel is unique. It is the only passage in the Bible that describes miracles not directly performed by Jesus. The Immaculate Conception and Resurrection were manifested by the hand of God. The authenticity of this Gospel is based on the truth that Divine intervention is real and that miracles (of all sorts) happen. The miracle of Divine intervention has been occurring since the beginning of time and continues to this day. If one accepts this, then to believe this Gospel does not require a giant leap of faith as miracles happen at Lourdes, and at mass with the miracle of changing bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

What is required is two truths: 1. a belief in God [or a higher being] and 2. that God is ever-present. Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Jews all believe in the miracle of Divine intervention, they just use different names. Christians have no monopoly on miracles. Divine intervention is exactly what happened to Mary and Joseph... not so hard to believe when you put what happened to them in context. Just think, if God created heaven and earth, does a pregnant virgin seem so impossible? It is clear that Mary and Joseph were guided by the Holy Spirit.

The sign was from the Lord Himself. The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." The sign is from the Lord Himself: for all of us, in this present now, in this historic moment.

Emmanuel is God with us in the present. God is with us, all of us: rich, poor, generous, selfish, right, left, all colors, all backgrounds. God shows no boundaries, limitations, or caveats. He joins us as we are; accompanies each one of us along the way. God is with us. ALL OF US! God is with us in this present moment, wherever we sit or stand or lie: God is present. Every breath we take is His. The air we breathe is His. All we need to do is be still in Him: He is right here, NOW.

Pope Leo XIV demonstrates his own belief that Divine intervention occurs today by canonizing two young, modern-day saints. The miracles associated with Carlo Acutis (1991 - 2006) and Pier Giorgio Fassati (1901 - 1925) are proof that Divine intervention still occurs.

The world is, it seems, full of conflicting passions with few promises in sight of anything better, anytime soon. The nation, its institutions, its protections of freedom and fairness, imperfect yet high value, declines. Given a choice, the majority of people sometimes choose grievance and retribution, cruelty. Yet God is with us. Now. In this historical moment.

God walks with us in weakness, confusion, anger - and in acting for the right. He calls us forward into His future by strengthening us in His present. He loves us in our suffering, yearning for Him. Now.

The Lord comes – steeped in a sign of Love so great, we cannot comprehend it with our hearts and minds – and yet the Lord still comes. While we are prone to allow our fears and shadows to exert agency over us, we are still called by our gracious God to make room for him in the home of our hearts.

For all the Earth, in her diverse elements and rhythms, makes way for the arrival of the King of Glory.

What are we waiting for, then? Why should we delay the welcoming of Emmanuel with everything we are and have? For, the Holy One has come for us, to be with us, and to become us. Let us not be weary but rather make haste and behold with courage the birth of Him that has been foretold. The glory of God and the fulfillment of Divine Love's mystery await us.

About the Author: Dick Ullrich considers himself to be a "Marianist without vows" due to the fact that he has worked with the Brothers and Priests and Lay Communities since 1962. Dick served as the inaugural Chair of the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative (MSJC) from 1998-2002 and currently lives in Maryland. He took a different approach in developing this reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Advent as he invited four colleagues to read one of the December 21 Scriptures/Psalm 24, reflect, and share with us what that scripture means for us in 2025.