



## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### FIRST READING: Isaiah 7:10-16

A reading from Isaiah.

<sup>10</sup>The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying,

<sup>11</sup>“Ask a sign of the LORD your God;  
let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.”

<sup>12</sup>But Ahaz said,

“I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.”

<sup>13</sup>Then Isaiah said,

“Hear then, O house of David!

Is it too little for you to weary mortals  
that you weary my God also?

<sup>14</sup>Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son  
and shall name him Immanuel.

<sup>15</sup>He shall eat curds and honey

by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.

<sup>16</sup>For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good,  
the land before whose two kings you are in dread  
will be deserted.”

Word of God, word of life.

or

The word of the Lord.

### PSALMODY: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

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**FIRST READING**    *Isaiah = eye-ZAY-uh    Ahaz = AY-haz    Sheol = sheh-OHL*

This complicated little text reminds us that to be adequately prepared to read in the assembly one will often be helped by a biblical commentary. We cannot orally communicate what we do not understand. There are three characters in this scene: Ahaz, the king; Isaiah, the prophet; and almighty God. God invites the king to seek a sign of God's care for him. The king says, “No, thanks,” suggesting that he does not wish to force God to prove God's self (“I will not put the LORD to the test”). In fact, the king's unwillingness to ask for a sign reflects the king's indifference toward God. It is to that indifference that Isaiah responds in verse 13, saying, in effect: “Exhausting the patience of the people you deal with isn't enough for you? You must try the patience of God as well?!” The prophet's words are dripping with sarcasm. Then Isaiah announces that God will provide a sign despite the king's indifference. Although Isaiah is likely making reference to a child born in his own day, the hearer today will hear in this promise a reference to the birth of Jesus. That's what the reader will want to help the assembly to hear, because today's gospel in Matthew will refer to this word of Isaiah.

## SECOND READING: Romans 1:1-7

A reading from Romans.

<sup>1</sup>Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle,  
set apart for the gospel of God,  
<sup>2</sup>which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,  
<sup>3</sup>the gospel concerning his Son,  
who was descended from David according to the flesh  
<sup>4</sup>and was declared to be Son of God  
with power according to the spirit of holiness  
by resurrection from the dead,  
Jesus Christ our Lord,  
<sup>5</sup>through whom we have received grace and apostleship  
to bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles  
for the sake of his name,  
<sup>6</sup>including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,  
  
<sup>7</sup>To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:  
Grace to you and peace  
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Word of God, word of life.                      or                      The word of the Lord.

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### SECOND READING

The whole reading is one sentence! It is the salutation of a letter. Pay close attention to the commas as pause points. First, Paul establishes his credentials by describing his relationship to Jesus. Then he tells the reader who Jesus is. Finally, he summarizes the reason for his writing ("to bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles . . . , including you"). All this leads to that most familiar greeting: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father." A substantial pause just before those words may help the assembly to hear them more clearly.

## GOSPEL: Matthew 1:18-25

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

<sup>18</sup>Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.  
When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph,  
but before they lived together,  
she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit.

<sup>19</sup>Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man  
and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace,  
planned to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup>But just when he had resolved to do this,  
an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,  
“Joseph, son of David,  
do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,  
for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

<sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus,  
for he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill  
what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup>“Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”  
which means, “God is with us.”

<sup>24</sup>When Joseph awoke from sleep,  
he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him;  
he took her as his wife

<sup>25</sup>but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son,  
and he named him Jesus.

The gospel of the Lord.

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### GOSPEL

The gospel celebrates the name of Jesus. Consider allowing the first sentence to serve as a kind of title for the reading. A sense of quiet wonder will advance the reading and allow the assembly to focus on the names “Jesus” (verses 18, 21, and 25) and “Emmanuel” (verse 23).