

In the name of God Father Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

This past week, Kay and I were with a group of clergy and spouses. And the table conversation turned to the differences between extroverts and introverts. Did you know that the majority of clergy the majority. . . . are introverts. . . . Sound strange?

After all clergy are the ones who dress up in this strange liturgical garb, who are up front. . . .who stand in the pulpit and speak while everyone else listens at least we hope so. And yet most clergy prefer to be quiet.most. . . . certainly not all we know a few of those too. But by temperament. I am an introvert. Years ago when I took a personality questionnaire, I ended up right in between extrovert an introvert and the psychologist who is administering the test, I went to him said, "What do I do"? And he said tell me, do crowds energize you or just wipe you out?. For me, they just wiped me out. He said, "Put yourself over as an introvert".

So why do I mention this today at the beginning of this sermon. Because I believe that the season of Advent is designed for introverts. One more week to Christmas day. One more week of the season of Advent. Another way of putting it. . . one more week before celebrating. . . . one more week of contemplating. But being quiet and waiting is hard for some people.

The majority of the American public are extroverts. And the world reflects that. We've already jumped in to Christmas, with its lights and its tensile and its carols and jingles. It started back at Halloween and it's at fever pitch this week. And here we are spending one more week of listening and watching and waiting. One more week preparing our hearts to receive the Gift of The Christ child. So the question I would pose to you this morning, is this. Are you paying attention to God in your life? Are you paying attention to God in your life? Now I want you to hold that question in the back of your mind as we consider the scripture appointed for today.

The Gospel according to Matthew focuses more on Joseph in this morning's readings than on Mary. I want to suggest to you that Jesus was someone who paid attention to God in his life. And when we normally think of the Nativity of Jesus, we usually think and concentrate on Mary. She is a blessed virgin. She is Theodicus the God bearer. And in most nativity scenes, you see Mary and the babe center stage and Joseph is usually more in the background. A silent supporting role. Despite the profound role of Joseph and the birth of Jesus, I think we may have overlooked the importance of his participation in the incarnation of God.

Look at the story. Before the wedding invitations have been ordered and the bridesmaids selected, Mary approaches Joseph with "*the news*". . . . She's pregnant!

So, what's to be done? Joseph's. Response to this devastating news is I think rather noble. Remember, that in first century Jewish culture, not only would Mary have been disgraced by being pregnant and unmarried, but so would her husband to-be.

Now this was a fifteen year old girl by tradition and the engagement would have been for one year. But it would have the same legal boundaries as a marriage. For her to be pregnant, would have dire results. The best she could hope for was scandal. The worst she could look forward to was to be put to death.

Joseph's reaction when he hears that Mary was pregnant is to suspect her of adultery, one of the grounds for divorce, in Jewish law. So he decides to quietly divorce her not make too much noise about it not bring too much scandal and attention to her. But God has another idea. And in a dream, an Angel tells Joseph, "I've got a plan for this baby",

. . . . and Joseph changes his mind, and you know the rest of the story. He names the child Jesus he who saves, and in effect adopts this child as his own.

Now just as in all marriages, Joseph doesn't have the faintest notion of what he's getting into. . . but he has the faith to get into it. In the midst of things, he can't understand he affirms Mary, anyway.

Remember the question I ask you to keep in the back of your mind during the sermon. Are you paying attention to God in your life, Joseph was. . . Now admittedly, he had an angel in a dream to help him pay attention. . . and we can only take that analogy so far. But what about you and me. . . who rarely have an angel whispering in our ear. . . or do we? At our best we know what God would have us do in our lives. He has shown us, what is good and true. To love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. . . simple, right? . . . but, oh so hard at times.

Do we pay attention to God in our lives and act in faith? Joseph was faithful, in spite of conventional wisdom. When all the evidence to the contrary says that we should play it safe. We can follow Joseph's way of being faithful in spite of. . . . In spite of doubt. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe the dream is only a dream. It's not reality. Don't be your food to look out for yourself. In spite of doubt we can look to Joseph for a model and not let fear overwhelm faith. . . .

Are you paying attention to God and your life? What is he calling you to do to be. . . .To whom is he sending you to show forth the good news of God's love and acceptance. How are you making a difference for good in the lives of those you encounter. And this last week of Advent. . . . spend time in quiet. . . .spend time contemplating God's will for your life. Amen.