

## **Advent IV 2021**

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.  
Amen.**

**December is one of my favorite months. Obviously, there's an excitement about the Nativity of Our Lord. But it is also a month of Feast Days and Holy Days for some of the most well-loved Saints of God. One of these we celebrate this Tuesday, in fact, it is a Prayer Book Day of Obligation: The Feast of Saint Thomas the Apostle.**

**If you recall, Thomas was not with the other disciples when they first saw Jesus following His Resurrection. When they tell Thomas, his reply is, "I will not believe you until I can see the wounds in his hands and side and until I can touch them."**

**Thus, the nickname, "Doubting Thomas." It doesn't seem that his doubt was so terrible a sin. After all, even the most loyal disciple would certainly have questioned such a story. As we know, for Thomas, seeing was believing as he does in fact encounter the risen Lord and utters the words still remembered today: "My Lord and my God."**

**In a matter of days, we will celebrate the Birth of our Lord. Last week, our focus was on his cousin, John the Baptist. John's birth was**

**miraculous because his parents appeared to be too old to conceive a child. If that sounds familiar, we saw the same scenario with Abraham and Sarah. God said they would conceive their first child; their age made them doubt; the baby came anyway.**

**The miraculousness of Jesus' conception was of a greater order of magnitude. His parents had never slept together-his mother, still a virgin. It is important that we not fall into what we could call mid-century "ism" or era "ism-which would be to think that God had the miracle of the Virgin Birth take place in the first century because people were superstitious and ignorant enough to believe in such things then.**

**If you read the accounts in the Gospels of Saint Luke and Saint Matthew, you discover that the first two people who doubted the possibility of conceiving a child without both a male and female parent were the first two people to hear about it: Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary herself.**

**These were people who knew where babies came from, and who were able to see that what they were being asked to take part in was in fact a miracle-a suspension of the rules of how things normally go, by the man who wrote the rules in the first place.**

**The Archangel Gabriel told Mary God wanted her to be the mother of his Son. Using her native shrewdness, she asked, “How can this be, seeing I know not a man?” Gabriel explained how it would happen, and then used as a clincher-to remove all doubt, the example of John the Baptist’s mother. Look at your cousin Elizabeth. Everybody thought she was too old to conceive a child, and she is six months pregnant, for with God nothing shall be impossible.**

**Joseph visited his fiancée shortly thereafter, and she gave him a sort of good news/bad news report. “The bad news is that I’m pregnant, but the good news is that the Father is the Holy Ghost. St. Matthew is quite clear that Joseph just plain did not believe her-he doubted-too. This doubt would eventually pass after the Angel of the Lord speaks to him in a dream.**

**Now I bring all of this up just to show that religious doubt and questioning is a part of spiritual growth. IF you pursue your questions until you get the answers as the doubting Bible characters did. The doubts of Joseph and Mary also suggest something about Advent we don’t often think about.**

**I’m referring to what they went through for the nine months of Mary’s pregnancy-which we mark on the Church’s Kalendar from**

**Annunciation Day, March 25 until Christmas itself. We have no reason to think that there was anything extraordinary about Mary's pregnancy other than its beginning.**

**But still, we wonder what they might have been thinking. What could they have been expecting? They knew the baby was going to be a boy, so that mystery was solved. They knew what they thought had happened to them was not an hallucination, because the pregnant Mary met her cousin Elizabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist, and John leapt in her womb for joy at being in the presence of the Saviour. But it still must have been puzzling for them-as well as a bit frightening.**

**Joseph and Mary's experience in those nine months exemplifies a question we all ask about all sorts of things: "I wonder how it is all going to turn out?" That question certainly arises during Advent. Obviously, we know part of the story. Jesus has come. We're well-familiar with that coming and will celebrate it this Friday. But the "Second" Advent is more of a puzzle to us. We have glimpses of how that Second Coming will look, but for now, much is still a mystery. The good news is, we don't have to worry about it, that is, the how and when. We need only believe and trust in the words we heard on**

**the Second Sunday in Advent: When our Lord returns “Look up” for your redemption is at hand. For now, let’s look forward to Friday as we Rejoice in the Lord Always.**

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.**

**Amen.**