

**“Walk with the Spirit of Love”  
Matthew 1:18-25  
December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007  
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It's crunch time now folks. We have only just a short amount of time before it is all been said and done. How many still have shopping to do? How many are relaxed and completely ready? That's what I thought. Me too! It can be very hectic in these last days, especially if we are trying to get the right gift. I know the hot item is the Nintendo Wii this year and people are going to great lengths to get them. Well here is a clip from the movie *Jingle All the Way* where a Dad is trying to get the hot toy for his son. Watch what happens:

Has anyone else felt that way? Christmas sometimes seems like it is more of a free for all than anything else. In the season of joy and love, we don't necessarily show our love to others in the most appropriate way. Both with other shoppers, and I would contend, with those whom we claim to love. Perhaps much of our anxiety could be alleviated if we stopped showing our love with presents and did it more with our presence. (I know it's an old pun but it still works). How do we show our love to others? Is it through the most expensive gift, or the thing that someone absolutely wants, or is it about remembering the gift that was given to us, one that we didn't necessarily ask for or even knew that we wanted but it came none the less, and was given to us.

Joseph Pennel said in his book *From Anticipation to Transfiguration*: “There is a lot of talk today about what makes Christmas. Newspaper and television advertisements coax

people into believing that they can have a real Christmas by going to a festive shopping center, eating at trendy restaurants, or watching glittering" Christmas programs" on television. Others believe that Christmas is made by the fastidious keeping of time-honored family rituals, such as, sentimental ornaments on just the right tree, eating food from a menu which has been handed down from generation to generation, or by visiting the same relatives at precisely the same time on Christmas Day. Some believe that Christmas is made by purchasing a uniquely special gift for every relative, friend, and acquaintance. To be sure, all of these contribute to our cultural understanding of Christmas.

But the answer to "What makes a real Christmas?" must be found in human history. That is what Joseph did. And, in a very real sense, it was the theology of Joseph which made possible the first Christmas. If Joseph had not cooperated with God's action in human history, the birth of Jesus would have been quite different.

The witness of Joseph calls us to cooperate with God's work in today's world. It calls us to respond to God's action among us.

Joseph, not having all of the evidence and knowledge of the future, decided to do more than law and custom required. He elected to do more than was expected of him. He let justice and compassion guide his decision about his pregnant betrothed. He was pulled, not by the strength of custom, but by the law of love.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Pennel Jr., From Anticipation to Transfiguration, CSS Publishing Company, p. 34.

How then do we respond to this love? Do we conform, or do allow ourselves to be transformed by the coming messiah?

The good news for us of course is how God responds to us. God has forever identified with the human dilemma. There may not be a soul in the world who truly understands your feelings. God understands. All in all of our lives we may turn away. God will never turn away.

In Tom Brokaw's book *The Greatest Generation*, a story is told of Mary Wilson, presently of Dallas, Texas. You would never know by looking at this modest woman that she was the recipient of the Silver Star and she bore the nickname "The Angel of Anzio." You will recall that when the Allies got bogged down in the boot of Italy during World War II, they attempted a daring breakout by launching an amphibious landing on the Anzio Beach. Unfortunately, the Allies got pinned down at the landing site and came dangerously close to being driven back into the ocean. It looked like another Dunkirk was in the making.

Mary Wilson was the head of the fifty-one army nurses who went ashore at Anzio. Things got so bad that bullets zipped through her tent as she assisted the surgeon in surgery. When the situation continued to deteriorate arrangements were made to get all of the nurses out. But Mary Wilson would have none of it. She refused to leave at the gravest hour. As she related her story years later, she said: "How could I possibly leave

them. I was a part of them." Our God is a good God. He does not desert us in our hour of need. God hears the cries of Israel. God hears the cries of the church. He hears the cries of God's children. Christmas is about God's eternal identification with the human dilemma.<sup>2</sup> And his response is the greatest gift of love.

So as we have the final stressors in our lives these next few days, as we struggle to finish the cookies and set the table, and get the right gift, as we snap and hiss at people in line or in traffic, take a deep breath, and remember that this is the season of love, God's love shown to us, let us respond like Joseph, and Mary, and receive that gift of grace in Christ Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> From sermons.com