

Homily Outline for the Fourth Sunday of Advent – Cycle A
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
December 21, 2025

† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

- I. As is often the case, today's first reading is connected to today's Gospel passage.
 - A. Isaiah the prophet and King Ahaz of Judah have a dramatic encounter here amid the threat of an attack against Jerusalem and the king's efforts to build up the city's defenses.
 - 1. Ahaz has gone out to observe what is being done to secure the city's water supply in case of a siege.
 - 2. This offers the prophet the perfect opportunity to challenge the king to consider what he is doing to secure his kingdom's relationship with God.
 - 3. Isaiah invites the king to choose any sign at all that will convince him of God's love and protection over the city. Isaiah wants the king to trust that the attack he so much fears will never materialize.
 - 4. Surprisingly, the king refuses the invitation to trust. He already has his own plans in place and feels that asking a sign from God will be an imposition.
 - 5. Isaiah announces that God is going to give the king a sign that will make it perfectly clear his fear of attack is entirely without foundation. A virgin will conceive and bear a son who will be given the name *Emmanuel*, meaning "God is with us." This name will give testimony to the faith of that young woman, who knew of God's power to save and give life.
 - B. Mary's faith stands in stark contrast to the lack of faith displayed by King Ahaz and his royal household.
- II. Today's Gospel passage that we heard from the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel tells of the fulfillment of the prophecy from today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah: *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us."*
 - A. While King Ahaz said "no" to God, Mary says "yes."
 - B. Today we hear Joseph give his "yes" also: to the dream, the angel's message, and to the responsibility of being a husband and a foster father.
 - C. To what is God inviting us to say "yes"?

III. The fulfillment of the prophecy of the coming of Emmanuel took a “yes.”

- A. It took the “yes” of Mary, whose response to the very unusual message delivered by an angel was: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”
- B. It took the “yes” of Joseph, who received a message in a dream to take Mary, who was with child, into his home as his wife.
- C. It takes our “yes” today, our commitment to be the bearers of God to those who need healing, understanding, compassion, and care.

IV. Like Mary and Joseph, we are called to say “yes” to Jesus by proclaiming the greatness of the Lord, by rejoicing in God our Savior, and by our commitment to the discipleship and stewardship way of life.

- A. We say “yes” to Jesus by building a fervent community of intentional and dedicated missionary disciples of the Risen Lord and steadfast stewards of God’s creation who seek to become saints.
- B. We say “yes” to Jesus by coming to Mass every Sunday and on all Holy Days of Obligation, and by going to Confession frequently to be forgiven of our sins.
- C. We say “yes” to Jesus as His disciples by following His commandments to love God and neighbor, and by respecting all human life from conception to natural death.
- D. We are challenged to say “yes” to Jesus’ command to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned.
- E. In short, as Christians we are called to do the work of Jesus, as we hear in the words of St. Teresa of Ávila: “Christ has no body now but yours; no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassionately on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he bears all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his Body. Christ has no Body now on earth but yours.”

V. Emmanuel, God is with us in the eucharistic feast we now prepare to share.

- A. May the food of his Body and Blood strengthen us to say “yes” to God’s invitation not only during this Christmas season, but in the new year ahead and throughout our lives.
- B. May God give us this grace. Amen.