

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 22, 2019

Matthew 1: 18-25

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.



20 But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

A reflection from Maribel Pérez, a mission co-worker, serving in Buenos Aires, Argentina

I am the oldest of four sisters. Every year for the holidays, I remember the first Christmas I spent without my mom.

I was seven years old. It was December 23 and, before she left for the hospital, my mom told me: "When I come home, I'm going to bring back a little brother or sister for you. You are going to love her very much and play with her every day. For now, behave yourself and take care of your little sister!"

My sister Vilma was only two years old then, and we stayed with our grandmother. My grandmother asked me to help her paint our Christmas tree so I would stop crying. It was not really a tree; it was just a bare shrub that she had found near the creek.

We white-washed the shrub and thought it looked beautiful! We decorated it with small toys and pinecones. We did not have colored lights because our house had no electricity.

On December 24, my grandmother bought us sparklers, we ate tamales and drank hot fruit punch. As was our tradition, when it was midnight we went out to the patio and, by the light of the moon, lifted our lighted candles to thank Jesus for coming to save the world.

When my grandmother finished her prayer, she shared with us the great news that our mom would be back the next day!

On December 25, 1971, my mom came home from the hospital with my sister Patty. We were together again.

My mom continues to be a fundamental pillar in my life. It's been eight years since we celebrated Christmas together, but this year she is with us in Buenos Aires.

As I read this account of the birth of Jesus, I thought how difficult it must have been for Mary – giving birth in Nazareth, far from home, without the help of her mother, family or friends.

Later, when people arrived seeking her child, she must have recalled all that the angel had told her.

Mary was a young woman, fearful perhaps, inexperienced, unsure of herself. But she was faithful and prepared to do her part for the salvation of the world.

This Christmas take a moment to appreciate Mary's "yes" to God, even if she couldn't have understood what that meant. We can be thankful for her courage and commitment and learn from the depth of her faith.

-Maribel Pérez

To learn more about Maribel's ministry, visit pcusa.org/dennis-and-maribel-smith.