

Our readings today offer us two stories ... of testing trust in God. **Ahaz** was **king** in Judah and ... **Isaiah** ... was God's prophet. King Ahaz had led his people into ... all **manner** of evil ... even sacrificing his own **son** ... as a burnt offering to the Canaanite god ... **Moloch!** Now ... **Israel**, allied with Aram ... that is modern Syria. They waged war against Assyria ... now in Iraq ... and they were trying to force Judah to join them in this war. But Ahaz, wanted instead, to ally Judah ... with the much stronger Assyria. The Lord sent Isaiah to warn him against this so Isaiah preaches that he should, instead, put his trust in **God**. He offers: "Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God; let it be deep as the netherworld, or high as the sky!" But Ahaz ... not wanting to listen ... and trusting in Assyria rather than God ... answered, "I will **not** ask!" So Ahaz, against Isaiah's warning, joined with Assyria and warred against Aram and Israel and ... **Judah** ... at first an ally ... would soon become a mere **vassal** of Assyria! Ahaz **failed** his test of trust in God ... **miserably** ... and **Judah** ... paid the price.

Now we move forward ... 700 years ... to the time of our Gospel. ... The normal Jewish marriage would come about in three steps. First would come the engagement, most often when the couple were mere children. It was arranged by the parents ... perhaps with the help of a professional matchmaker ... **often** without the couple ever having even **met!** Second would come the **betrothal**, a ratification of the engagement. Once the betrothal was entered into, it was absolutely binding. It lasted for one year. During that year the couple were known as man and wife, although they did not **yet** ... live together. It could only be terminated ... by divorce. The final stage was the marriage, which took place a year after the betrothal. Mary and Joseph were in the **betrothal** stage. Joseph was likely counting the days until he could bring Mary into their Home and begin a life of wedded bliss. Just imagine how **crushed** he must have been when he found out his betrothed ... his **beloved** ... was pregnant. We don't know the exact time that Joseph became aware of this but I'm sure he felt like he'd been kicked in the stomach. His hopes were suddenly **shattered!** He must have been angry ... and **confused!** Why did this happen? How **could** he face this betrayal? What was he to do? Mosaic Law said that a woman found in adultery should be stoned to death ... and

**Joseph** ... was a just man who **respected** and obeyed the law! ... But despite everything he still loved her and would **not** ... make a public example of her. Of course ... there was absolutely **no** way he could marry her ... his integrity would **never** allow him to marry an **adulteress** and pretend this child was his. So he made the **heartbreaking** decision to divorce Mary ... quietly. And **then** ... God's messenger told him **not** to be afraid ... and to take Mary ... **and** her Child ... into his home. The angel went on to explain ... that the child was **indeed** ... fathered by God **Himself!** And as **impossible** as this was to believe ... according to the wisdom of the world ... Joseph **did** believe ... and he **trusted!**

And so ... he took his beloved into his home **but** ... this story is far from over. In the days to come we will hear how ... he learned that he and his very, **very** pregnant wife must travel some 90 miles, in winter, to enroll in a census ... just so he could pay **more** taxes. But ... the Child was God's ... so again ... he **trusted** that God would protect them. And ... when they reached their destination ... there wasn't a room to be had so they had to settle for a stable ... still ... he **trusted**. You would think all this would be enough but **no!** ... The child had barely been born when the angelic messenger returned and told him that the jealous king wants the child **dead** ... and so now they must flee to Egypt. And yet again ... Joseph **trusted!**

Of course it would be remiss not to mention all the many times our Blessed Mother believed and trusted in the Lord. But I think perhaps most of us might have a bit harder time identifying with her most extraordinary faith. After all ... **she** was conceived without sin. None of us can say that. But Joseph was just one of us ... a good man just trying to make righteous choices ... just trying to do the very best he could. So I think most of us might find it easier to accept Joseph as a role model. But that bar is **also** set high. Following his example is not easy. Joseph passed test after test. How many of us could have passed those tests? ... Our challenge, as it was for Ahaz ... as it was for Joseph ... is to **listen** to the voice of God ... **believe** what He tells us ... and **then** ... **trust** ... in God ... in every aspect in our lives. Ahaz **failed** ... Joseph **passed**. How **have** we done in the past? How **are** we doing now? How **will** we do in the future?