

Choose to Trust

The characters and communities in this week's readings have all experienced turmoil. Joseph wrestles with how to cope with the news that the woman he is engaged to is pregnant with a child who is not his. The land of King Ahaz is in turmoil, and the psalmist's community has experienced a disaster. Paul's letter to the Romans is perhaps less about turmoil and more about identity in Christ.

Focus scripture: Matthew 1:18–25

Matthew 1:18–25 is a reading with real human emotions. When Joseph hears the news that the woman to whom he is engaged is expecting a child who is not his own, his first reaction is to quietly break up with her and not disgrace her publicly.

In Joseph's time, a promise to be married was quite different from many engagements today. In modern times, many engagements and the relationship can be ended with words, and yes, often emotional heartbreak. In biblical times, however, an engagement (or betrothal) was much more of a contractual bond. The betrothal had two parts: the first was a legal contract, and the second was a pledge of marriage and marriage feast. (This second part could take place considerably later than the first.) When Joseph hears of Mary's pregnancy, they were between these two phases. They were essentially married because of the legal contract and commitment, but they had not yet moved in together. The suspicion of adultery at this stage of their commitment could be grounds for divorce.

Mary's announcement brings their family into turmoil, and Joseph responds accordingly. It is then he receives a message from God's angel, which comes to him in a dream, urging Joseph to not be afraid and to fulfil his marriage to Mary. Joseph chooses to trust the message and marries Mary. Together they raise the child Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

Isaiah 7:10–16 As king of the southern tribe (Judea), Ahaz has chosen not to join Israel's military alliance with Syria against Assyria.

Israel threatens to attack Judea if they do not get on board. In the midst of political turmoil, the prophet encourages King Ahaz to trust in God rather than in military might. Isaiah assures Ahaz of God's protection and says the birth of Emmanuel will be a sign for him. Divine light is shed on a human predicament.

God's purpose for God's people is also found **Psalms 80:1–7, 17–19**, which is written in response to a disaster. The people lament and pray as a community. They wrestle with God, and request that God listens, acts, and then transform their situation. They consider their plight to be God's responsibility.

Responsibility is addressed in a slightly different way in **Romans 1:1–7**. Here the apostle Paul and the Roman city have obligations and responsibilities to one another, and they are interconnected. Paul notes that he is called to be an apostle, and Christians are called to a life in Christ. Paul reflects that he is a servant of Christ, and acts under the authority of Christ. Through this reading, we are also reminded of our identity in Christ, and to trust that God is never absent in our lives.

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The phrase "God with us" was a powerful message of hope to the Hebrew people and to the early Christian community. Choosing to trust in God when we are experiencing turmoil can be a challenge. How do you find ways to choose to trust in "God with us" when life is hard? How do you sense God with us in our time?



Focus scripture
Matthew 1:18–25

Additional scriptures
Isaiah 7:10–16
Psalms 80:1–7, 17–19
Romans 1:1–7

**God of all time
and space,
we rejoice in your
abundant love.
Open our hearts
to celebrate your
gift of Jesus.
Bless us with
patience and
vision,
faithfulness and
courage as we
follow the Christ.
Amen.**

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