

Today we celebrate the fourth week of lent. We have lit the candles of hope, peace, joy, and now love. Our anticipation for the birth of the Christ child has grown more every week.

At the beginning of our confirmation sessions, I asked the confirmands what is the difference between the Old and the New Testaments? They gave me some great answers. The most notable was probably that the Old Testament was old and the New Testament was newer.

I couldn't fault them for that answer. That answer is correct. One is older than the other. One starts with the beginning of time and the other starts with the birth of Christ. And there is definitely a lot of time between the two.

In the New Testament, there are two versions of the birth of Christ. One in the Gospel according to Luke and the other is in the Gospel of Matthew. You might be familiar with Luke's version as Linus tells us about it in a Charlie Brown Christmas. And Matthew's version was shared with us today.

These two scripture readings represent two different vantage points. One tells of the birth from Joseph's perspective, whereas the other from Mary's. We are told about the path of the righteous man compared to the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin Birth.

In our confirmation class, we talked a little bit about how different the birth of Christ would be if it happened today. I want you to take a second and think about that. What was the first thing you thought about? Would he still be born in a manger? Would they have a gender reveal party? Who would go and visit him? Or did you question the Virgin Birth?

The first thing that we talked about in class was about Joseph and whether or not we would believe Mary about her virgin conception. Over the years, I've had many conversations about Mary's virgin pregnancy. There is always so much doubt about his conception.

I was talking with one of my friends last year about it. And he used to tell me how much of an atheist he is, and he would use the Virgin Birth, as a point of reference. One day I asked him, why do you doubt the pregnancy so much, but you have no problem believing that the angels spoke to the shepherds, the wisemen, and to Joseph?

Our faith falters at the virgin birth because we cannot conceptualize it. Humans are not earthworms. We cannot reproduce asexually. Our instincts are to doubt it and to doubt Mary. Joseph's instincts were to doubt it. He was going to divorce her.

We forget that Mary is not like the rest of us. Mary was the Immaculate Conception, not Jesus. She was born without sin and she lived without sin. We were not born without sin and no matter how hard we try, we do not live sin free.

Our own prejudice clouds our judgment. Our own faults blind us to the truth. We see wrong doings in places where there are none. We don't believe others when they are honest or clean.

When I was in college, one of my fraternity brothers was a virgin. He was very religious and was saving himself for marriage. Every time someone found out, it became this big ordeal. Nobody believed him, because at that time, we were conditioned as a society that most people were having premarital sex.

As the new year approaches, I ask you to take a step back. Before you make a decision about someone, try to see life from their point of view. Do not be quick to judge. Be Mary instead of Joseph.

Amen.