May the words of my mouth and the mediations of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight – Our strength and our redeemer – Amen.

It’s not hard to imagine what others were saying and thinking about Mary. “Did you hear? Mary’s pregnant. I never expected this. Mary and Joseph should know better. They aren’t even married yet.” “Well, I heard that Joseph’s not even the father. How could she do that to him? He’s such a good and just man.” “Who is the father?” “They say Joseph still intends to take her as his wife. He’s going to marry her after all this.” “This whole thing is a disgrace. She and her love child should be stoned. The law requires it.”

I am sure Joseph heard the whispers and saw the looks, if not in the village then certainly in his own imagination. Joseph knows this a scandal. But it is not a scandal of immorality. The real scandal is that God is with us. We thought God was up there, or out there, maybe somewhere in the future. But then Mary got pregnant. The scandal of that pregnancy is that God is intimately present. God’s holy spirit fills the womb of Mary. The wind of God is blowing through her life. The scandal is that humanity can become pregnant with God.

This child is the revelation of God’s love for humanity. Love that can be seen, heard, touched. This embodied love of God will feed and nourish God’s people.

Joseph’s daytime resolution to quietly dismiss Mary has given way to a night of dreaming, pondering, and wrestling. What appears to be one thing in the light of public scrutiny, however, becomes another in the night of silence, listening, and waiting. Joseph begun to see this situation, this scandalous pregnancy, through the eyes of faith rather than the stares of the villagers. Mary’s story and the angel’s words now speak louder than the villagers’ voices.

So, Joseph awoke in the morning and did what he had to do. He began emptying himself. He let go of fear. He let go of the villagers’ voices and stares. He let go of his doubts and questions. He let go of his own reputation and standing in the community. He let go of his ideas and hopes for what his marriage to Mary could have been. He let go of the law and punishment. With each letting go Joseph emptied himself so that, by God’s grace and mercy, he might become the womb that would protect, nourish, and provide security to Mary and her child.

He would be the womb that sheltered Mary and Jesus from Herod’s rage and the slaughter of the innocents. He would be the womb that safely took Mary and Jesus to Egypt. He would be the womb that sustained their lives in that land. He would be the womb that brought them back to Nazareth when the time was right.

Isn’t that what wombs do? They are the place where life is created and sustained, nourished and grown. They offer security and protection. They are that deep interior place where God’s life and breath meet and unite with ours to create something beautiful and sacred. The womb Joseph offered was as important as the one Mary offered. Even as God was acting in Mary’s womb to create new life, divine-human life, so God was acting in Joseph’s womb to sustain that life.

At one level today’s gospel is about Mary and Joseph but at another level it is about you and me. It is about us becoming more open and receptive, more womb-like in this final week of Advent so that we all might give birth to God’s Son in our time and our culture.

Joseph guides us to Christmas reminding us that before a womb can be filled it must first be empty. He invites to enter the night of faith and to begin emptying ourselves of all that keeps our womb closed. We must let go of all those things like fear, guilt, resentment and anger, the villagers’ voices and stares, the thoughts that say we are not enough, the doubts of God’s presence, the isolation and loneliness of loss and sorrow. Letting go creates space, openness, and opportunity for the world will hear good news, and once again we will discover God is with us. Amen.