

I haven't heard much about him lately, but fifteen years ago or so, David Copperfield was a big name in magic
I didn't get into it as much as some kids, but I think almost every little kid has some fascination with magic
Without getting too far off topic, I do believe that there are dark arts that tap into the demonic world
However, I believe most magic is harmless as it is just a slight of hand, an optical illusion
The key to this type of magic is to get people to see what you want them to see, not what is really going on
In the first reading from Isaiah, Ahaz is the king of Judea - scholars believe he ruled in the eighth century BC
God tells Ahaz to ask for a sign, but Ahaz says he will not tempt the Lord - a sign is usually given to a person who is lacking in
faith to help them realize that God is who He says He is - however, Ahaz is saying he already believes in God and trusts
in Him - He doesn't need a sign - Ahaz's faith is already secure
God says He will give Ahaz a sign anyways - the sign will be a virgin conceiving and bearing a son, and the son's name will be
Emmanuel, which means, "God is with us"
Just as in our own lives, there were times in the Bible when the people felt like God was definitely with them - there were also a
lot of times in the Bible when it seemed like God was far, far away and didn't care
But God is here - He is present and He is with us - sometimes our actions and decisions make the flame of the Holy Spirit in
our hearts more dim
But because of our Baptism, the flame will always be there - God is not going to force the flame into a fire - He has the wood,
the fuel - He has the grace we need to be on fire for Him - however, we have to put the wood on the fire - we have to
allow God's grace to work in our hearts
St. Paul, being Saint Paul, doesn't mince words - he says that he is a slave of Jesus Christ - he's like, "Jesus, throw as much
wood in my fire as my soul can take." - Paul surrenders his soul to the grace of God, to the grace of Jesus Christ
St. Paul sees himself as the successor to the prophets of the Old Testament, of holy Scriptures - now in Jesus Christ, in light of
the Gospel, it is his turn to tell the world about God, about Jesus Christ
And it is not just Saint Paul - Saint Paul says we have all received the grace of apostleship through the death and resurrection
of Jesus Christ our Lord
Grace is like sunlight - sunlight falls everywhere - however some of us stay indoors, some of us put on suntan lotion, some of
us stay under an umbrella, but some of us go outside and soak it in
We need to be the Christians, the followers of Christ, that are not afraid to risk going out into the unknown of God's will and
soak in the rays of the grace, the rays of the Son, God the Son
The more we receive the grace of apostleship, the more obedient we will be - the more obedient we are, the more grace we will
receive
Why is grace, apostleship, and obedience important? - because we are all called to holiness - we are all called to be heirs of
the Kingdom of God, to be sons and daughters of our Lord and King - the path to citizenship is holiness
Holiness is the path of happiness and joy - sometimes, because of the fallen state of our soul, we can sometimes be convinced
that holiness will lead to misery
Holiness may lead to hardship and woe, but we know for sure that ultimately it leads to happiness, joy, and freedom

Just like magic, because of our fallen state of our souls, things don't always appear to be what they are

This happened to Joseph - St. Matthew says in the Gospel that Mary was betrothed to Joseph - some scholars think this is something more than our modern day engagement, but something less than our current understanding of marriage
Saint Matthew tells us the reader that Mary is pregnant through the Holy Spirit - however, no one has told this yet to Saint Joseph

Now 99.99% of the time there is only one way to get pregnant - this was even more true in Jesus' time - so Joseph, being the righteous man that he is, decides he is going to divorce Mary since the child is obviously not his - think of the pain of betrayal Joseph must have felt - however, Joseph loved Mary and had compassion on her so he was going to divorce her quietly because the penalty for adultery was stoning to death - he couldn't stand the thought of that happening to her

This was Joseph's plan, but then an angel came to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Saint Matthew says this virgin conception fulfills the prophecy from Isaiah that we heard in the first reading

Saint Matthew says that after the dream, Joseph did as the angel commanded him to do

Now, I don't know about you, but it is probably good that I don't act on my dreams - and yet Joseph's heart was so pure, so humble, that he was willing to change, to admit he was wrong

Remember Joseph had somehow found out that Mary was with child - Joseph sleeps on this knowledge for at least for one night - so one can only imagine the awkward and hard conversation Joseph must have had with Mary in the morning after the dream

"Um...Mary...I was wrong - the things people are accusing you of, the things I might have even accused you of...those are lies. You were telling the truth. I am so sorry for not believing you. Will you forgive me?"

Now if it was me, Joseph would have gotten the silent treatment for at least a couple of weeks - but Mary saw the love in Joseph's eyes and her immaculate heart melted immediately - she knew he meant well

As we near the end of Advent and prepare to celebrate the birthday of Jesus, maybe it would be wise to look at our own relationships, especially our family relationships, and see if there are any misunderstandings that resulted because we didn't see things as they really are - maybe we made assumptions about someone or some situation - maybe we stereotyped someone

We need to pray for the grace to see reality and not just what we want to see

We need to see people for who they are and not who we think they are or who we want them to be

Jesus, Emmanuel, IS with us - He came to save us from our sins and to save us from seeing things as they seem - Jesus came to free us so that we can live in reality with joy

There is nothing more real than Jesus and His love for us - 2000 years ago, God Himself came to dwell on earth taking on our human nature - 2000 years later, God is still with us - He is still Emmanuel

No matter how things seem, this is reality: God is with us - we are called to live in this reality - if we do, we will be happy and holy in the Kingdom of God