

A Messed-Up Christmas

Reflection from Fr Charles

Disrupted plans? Christmas ruined? Disappointed, angry and afraid? Mary and Joseph can help you there. They know all about lives being messed up.

Christmas as we know it may have been shredded, but the Nativity of the Lord is as fresh, relevant and as telling as ever, and perhaps even more so for us this year.

Joseph the carpenter, a solid respectable man, and his lovely young fiancée Mary are planning to get married and settle down. What could possibly go wrong? Then the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will conceive a son by the Holy Spirit. Mary, lonely and fearful, the unmarried pregnancy risks her losing Joseph, her security, her place in society. Then the angel moves on to Joseph, and against all wise counsel, Joseph takes Mary and her unborn child to his home, agreeing to be a father to a child he knows not. Then, because of the census, they have to go on a long journey to Bethlehem. Mary goes into labour, there's no room at the inn, so she gives birth in a cold draughty stable surrounded by farm animals. Various weird and uninvited people whose lives have also been disrupted by strange angels and stars come crowding in. Then the family have to flee for their lives and live in exile for two years in Egypt and even on their return, fear still surrounds them. Now that's really messed up.

People, presents, turkeys, lorries and their drivers, are all in the wrong places. Loved ones are far away. Some have died, alone and distant. It wasn't meant to be like this. And so this year we face a searching examination. As we strip away the layers of Christmas 'stuff' will we find a kernel of faith alive and well? Or is there a fear that if we look too closely we will find that all the good and wholesome stuff of family, friends and festivity has lost its faith foundation and without it we have nothing?

It's time then to meditate afresh on the Nativity of the Lord, on the silent stoic faithfulness of Joseph and the quiet contemplation of Mary who ponders all these things in her heart. It is these humble qualities that carry them through their disrupted lives – and this is what they teach us at this moment.

Jesus himself will be a man apart: a precocious twelve year old, a man who accepts and claims his destiny while alone and starving in a desert and later crying alone in a garden in terror for his life, a man who leaves the group to pray alone, a man who will die alone, abandoned. And a man who will rise again to new life in the total privacy and silence of the sealed tomb.

So for all humanity, weary, disrupted, displaced, and alone, Jesus, Mary and Joseph are there with us, showing us how it's done.