

The Virgin will conceive and give birth to a son.

Let us never forget that the birth of Jesus was a real event. There is no denying the reality of Jesus as one like us. What both Matthew and Luke explore in their Infancy Narratives with care and insight, is the journey of God into the human condition. Most particularly this exploration centres on two people; Mary and Joseph; a mother and a father to be, who, for nine months, just as every other mother and father to be, are called upon to wait. Time will move no quicker for them. They had to deal with all the same anxieties and expectations that have every other expectant mum and dad. The gospel writers shape this period of waiting to a specific area of that expectation. They relate that both Mary and Joseph use this *passing of time* to reflect, to pray and to act. It becomes an opportunity for enquiry and contemplation about how God in his grace becomes part of our world. Beautifully Matthew and Luke apply this *passing of time* to these three qualities, directly to the person of Joseph in the case of Matthew, and to Mary in the case of Luke. In doing so offer we are offered some deep insights as we too await the one who is to come to birth. Today's Gospel highlights the person of Joseph.

Joseph asks himself what is happening to him. His life has suddenly changed dramatically. What had been the ordinary hopes and dreams of a new husband are turned upside down. The questions come thick and fast: why, how and what does it mean. No doubt there is an element of confusion, of anger and of agonising. Firstly he is confronted with the reality of the situation. The human event of what has taken place. It has to be dealt with, to be accepted or rejected. Such thoughts are in Joseph's mind, yet he is an upright man. How will he respond? His understanding reasons that it should be dealt with according to law. His reflection is dominated by his sense of justice – what is the *just* thing to do? How do we reflect on our own dilemmas, on the choices that we must make about our own lives and the lives of those we live with? What are the influences that shape our decisions? Where does our faith fit in?

Joseph's reflections upon what is happening evolve through prayer. His prayer unfolds for him another possibility; one which accepts that notwithstanding what has taken place, however worrying or unexpected it is, it nevertheless still involves God. Joseph senses that whatever turn his life has taken it is to be received as part of the divinely created reality which we all inhabit. We all wish at some point in our lives that things had been different, that if only this or that thing had or hadn't happened, and my life would have been better. Joseph's prayer is not like that. Rather it is a prayer of deep acknowledgement about how our faith must be fundamental to our choices. Waiting, reflecting and prayer must ultimately give way to action. Joseph makes up his mind. He is no longer afraid of what he is going to do.

Such moments affect us all. Bad news, good news, sad events, happy events, all cause us to stop and think. We have to pause and reflect upon them and most importantly we have to pray about them. We have to turn to God and ask where is this taking me and how will I cope. The fruition of this waiting, this reflecting and praying is the presence of God, helping us and enabling us to respond to our changing circumstances and situations in love and in faith.