

Advent 5th Dec: Three extraordinary meetings No. 1



Joseph's dream, Laura James

One: Joseph has a dream

Over successive Mondays in advent I will look at extraordinary meetings involving Joseph, Mary, Elizabeth and some angels. And in these, as the first advent reflection on 24th November said, we shall see that all of life is indeed intrinsically and intricately bound up with the ever-present God/man Jesus as we see in the stories of these three very ordinary and unremarkable people how heaven and earth are becoming joined as one in human hearts.

Opening prayer

May I, with Joseph, know when to lay aside my own figuring out and trust in One who is much greater and who knows the beginning from the end.

The story unfolds

The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they came to the marriage bed, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit, but he didn't know that.) Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced.

While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: "Joseph, son of David, don't hesitate to get married. Mary's pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God's Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus - 'God saves' -because he will save his people from their sins." This would bring the prophet's embryonic sermon to full term:

Watch for this - a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son;

They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for "God is with us").

Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God's angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary. But he did not consummate the marriage until she had the baby. He named the baby Jesus. (Matthew 1: 18-25)

Reflection

Joseph is in a terrible position. 'Chagrined but noble' doesn't quite capture it. This situation is shame and disgrace all round. This should not have happened. Good-hearted though he is, Joseph must act within what is expected of him in his society. And out of the blue he meets an angel in a dream who says it's all OK, go ahead with the wedding. The first astonishing intervention of heaven into earth in what will be Jesus' family and Joseph doesn't miss a beat but sees a much bigger picture than the dictates of his own society.

Exercise

Think about what it would be like to be in Joseph's position of facing shame and disgrace and having God speak in a dramatic way that cuts across all your expectations and conventions. What would that feel like? How might you react?