

Holy Family



Flight to Egypt – Kelly Latimore

Today is the feast of the Holy Family. And I love that the pictures our scripture gives us today are not with Persil white washing and the scent of Bisto gravy, Hovis home-baking, and Werther's Original grandfathers that feel a bit like everyone's favourite Father Christmas

Because Families aren't like that. Life is not like that. Not all the time. Families are built of humans who love each other, but who have to work through all sorts of challenges and differences together. Joseph, having to take on Mary, and her son (not his), and face up to angels, and shepherds, to magi... and now to being a refugee trying to escape a murderous tyrant. It can't have been easy. Not for Mary, either, with her young child, reputation in tatters, and torn from her home. Nor even for Jesus, little child without a home, and with a price on his head.

Life comes with all its ups and downs. With those cosy moments round the manger, and with the difficult challenges that come unexpectedly over the horizon.

God knows. He lives our life, and makes it – all of it- his own.

In our reading today we have evil kicking up. It does that, whenever Love is born. I don't know if you find that – that just when everything is settled, and everyone is getting on, and especially if something new and beautiful has begun to be shared... evil spots it, and suddenly there is disruption, pain, brokenness and difficulty to be faced. Sometimes it is through the brokenness of the human heart, and sometimes it just feels like things happen that are way out of our control.

So, in our story, Love is born, and the angels sing peace and goodwill... and we turn round and Herod is on a mission to slaughter an entire village of children, because he feels threatened and insecure, and he has power to misuse.

But we also see Angels, and a plan, and God's hand on their journey. There are angels around you, always, and God's hand will be with you wherever you find yourself travelling. Jesus never promises life will be easy... he just promises he will be there with us, whatever comes, and he will get us through. His laughter, his abundance, his tears, his compassion, his strength... his Love.

If it were not Holy Family today, we would be keeping Holy Innocents. Remembering, alongside the Holy Family, all those families and children in Bethlehem who were caught up in Herod's murderous rage. How do we hold our sorrow for them in our hearts?

Into this pain, too, Jesus is born... and will share it later on the Cross, and gather it into his resurrection, his redemption that reaches all through time and touches all tears – because when we say every single heart and soul is gathered by Christmas into his family, we mean everyone. We pray for all, especially children, caught up in terrors not of their own making in the great tragedies of the world. For those trafficked, abused, for refugees, for those caught up in warfare; for the exploited and the lost.

Because all who might be seen as collateral or invisible to the Herods of this world, are *not invisible to God*, and he knows every single hair of their heads.

Just as Christmas reminds us that Jesus was born for us all - for every single person - so we are called by this day to look at all our fellow humans as our Family – those we find it easy, and those we find it hard. And especially those in need. And we do that always in his grace. That doesn't mean we don't sometimes have to keep boundaries to keep people safe, but it does mean we

always seek to find ways to pray for and work for love in the world. For everyone.

The Holy Family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus draws every family into its heart, and into the heart of God. All the beauty of love, but also all the brokenness and the hard journeys. God's family is our family now. Whatever you go through, you will never be alone.

And just to make the point, God also blesses us with a wider family; he brings us together as a wider community, to look out for each other, to pray for each other, in all that life brings... It is not for show that Jesus calls us his sisters and brothers, repeatedly in the gospels, that God calls us his children throughout the holy scriptures. It is not an affectation that here in church we call each other sister and brother, we talk of Church family. It reminds us of a truth.

When people come to the Church for baptism or for funerals or weddings, I always say this to them - *You're part of the family now.* We will rock out for you, that's what families do.

And that's a beautiful truth to be reminded of today, as we welcome little Rowan and Esther into the Family. Celebrating their part in their own little family, and welcoming them too into God's Family; chosen, beloved, protected and washed new with endless possibility... and into our own as a church family community here in Cradley, and indeed stretching all around the world... surrounded by sisters and brothers who will be there for you if you reach out.

Over the years I have seen church families do this – in so many ways, in prayer and love and practical help, in listening and presence and action. It's not perfect, because humans aren't perfect, but we are there for each other. There in the grumbles, the forgiveness, the pain, the blessing, the celebrating, and the love. It goes on and on. We are family. In some ways, water is at least as thick as blood.

In these places, God gives us the chance to learn how to do something truly amazing: love, accept and live with people whom we did not choose, who might be quite different to us; all that he draws together in his love. That is the gift of baptism – that is the gift of Christmas. If we can't do that here in Church, then there is no hope for the world.

Because we come to Church when things are sparkly, and we come when evil kicks off and things can be very hard. We come with our joys... and we come with our unnamed and unholdable sorrows. And we come, not because we feel holy, and life is easy all the time.... but because sometimes we don't, and

sometimes things are tough. We come to be touched and held together by something that is Holy, healing and embracing.

I used to drive my friend around the streets of Birmingham. And Birmingham is a tough place to drive – you have to be forthright, sometimes. And as I was... forthright... he would cross himself and pray... *Jesus, Joseph and Mary...* I loved him for it, for he knew his family would always have his back. I also slowed down a bit.

And just as they do in the small things, so they do in the big.

So when life throws us round a corner, or we feel we will never cross a junction, never arrive at our destination ... I smile, but seriously... let us pray *Jesus, Joseph and Mary...* for they do understand, and they do have our back. And they remind us to look out for each other, our sisters and brothers, in our need.

For no-one is invisible to God, he knows every hair from the head of every single one of his children. The huge, wonderful, diverse, chaotic, broken, beautiful... *Holy Family of God.*