

Advent Week 4:

A Reflection by Mike Smith SJ

This Sunday's reading tells what happened when Mary announced her pregnancy. Asked by God to become the mother of Jesus Christ, the son of God, she seems to have met with blank incomprehension when she told Joseph where her baby had come from. His immediate reaction was to divorce her, Things got sorted out quite quickly, as Joseph received a revelation that the child was indeed conceived by the Holy Spirit, but those few words in the gospel must conceal a great deal of sadness and distress for the new family.

After this difficult start to their married life, Mary and Joseph hoped for a peaceful and happy family life; but the difficulties didn't end with her unexpected pregnancy; they were to share many of the experiences of refugees. At that time their country was occupied by the Romans, who required everyone to take part in a census, which was to take place in the father's home town. Joseph was from Bethlehem, so they had to undertake the journey over rough terrain of eighty miles or so. Mary's baby was soon due, and they were probably never sure where they could rest, or where they would find food.

They were to experience the nightmare of being refugees again later on, when they had to flee King Herod's soldiers and trying to find refuge in Egypt, travelling with Jesus as a baby or toddler.

I don't think I can really even imagine what it must be like to be a refugee; forced out of my homeland by threats of violence, starvation, persecution, having to begin a journey with no clear destination, and no-one to provide care on the journey – and perhaps no money. And all these difficulties are compounded if, as with Mary and Joseph, a baby is on its way, or there are babies or children to take along with you. As well as the difficulties of caring for them, there is the constant fear of becoming separated. When I see the columns of refugees on television, I see the children too. They lack proper food, and education, and being able to run around and have fun.

...asylum seekers live with the constant threat of not being officially recognised as refugees, and being detained and deported

Advent Week 4:

A Reflection by Mike Smith SJ

I work in the day centre of the Jesuit Refugee Service in London. We, and other centres like us, can provide some help and support for them, but many asylum seekers live with the constant threat of not being officially recognised as refugees, and being detained and deported. Most of the asylum seekers and refugees we meet are single, but there are a few pregnant mothers, and a few with toddlers. The toddlers run up and down, making a noise and generally getting in the way – but that is a precious freedom, and a wonderful peace and safety.

That's why today's reading of the beginning of Mary and Joseph's often difficult and stressful family life, with Jesus on the way, is so poignant – still repeated seemingly endlessly in so many parts of the world. When we say grace in our Jesuit community, we always remember those who are not as lucky as we are – and I treasure the chance to do even a tiny bit to make that prayer come true.

I don't think I can really even imagine what it must be like to be a refugee; forced out of my homeland by threats of violence, starvation, persecution, having to begin a journey with no clear destination,

