

Ordinary Joe¹ - Advent 4

Date: 21 December, 4th Sunday in Advent, the Sunday after the Bondi Terror Attack.

Location: St George's Battery Point

Texts: Isaiah 7.10–16; Psalm 80; Romans 1.1–7; Matthew 1.18–25

It seems incredible that just last Sunday 2 gunmen opened fire on a crowd of Jews gathered at Bondi for the festival of Hanukkah. We have been appalled by what we have seen. We mourn those killed, and our hearts go out to those wounded, and those grieving. Amidst these horrible events, we've been captivated by the heroism of Ahmed al-Ahmed. An ordinary humble man: a husband, a father, a grocer, showing extraordinary courage in tackling and disarming one of the gunmen.

Our readings for this 4th Sunday in Advent focus on Matthew's account of Jesus' origins. Luke's Gospel gives us the story of Jesus' birth from Mary's perspective. In Matthew, we see them through Joseph's eyes. This morning I just want to take a few moments to reflect on Joseph, Jesus' adopted human father, in many ways an ordinary man. (These reflections are adapted from a piece by Mark Greene, writing for the London Institute from Contemporary Christianity.)

There are many characters in the cast of the Christmas story that have gripped the Church's imagination but there's one that has rarely had a place in the spotlight.

There's the Magi, exotic and somehow still gleaming in their silks after the long, dusty road from the East; there's Gabriel, winged, magnificent, fearsome and gentle, chosen to make an offer that might be refused; there's Simeon satisfied, no, exhilarated by something apparently so small – not even a hope fulfilled, just a hope assured; and, of course, there's Mary, young, vulnerable but open to God's plan and singing out words that will last forever. And then there's Joseph. Honest, solid Joe.

The carpenter. The man in the background. Almost always depicted as so much older than Mary, even by Rembrandt. Old enough to be her father – the protector, not the lover, of a young bride. There's Joseph ushering the donkey along the road; there's Joseph being turned away by the innkeepers; there's Joseph watching the Wise Men offer their gifts. No prophetic songs soar from his heart. In fact, the Bible records not a single word of his, and he slips out of the story without even a sentence to mark his passing.

¹ This sermon is adapted from a reflection by Mark Greene, taken from <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/what-does-joseph-bring-to-the-story-of-jesus-origins-in-matthew-1/>

He's a craftsman, a working man. God did not entrust his Son to be fathered by a rabbi or a scribe or a Pharisee or a rich merchant but by Joseph. A man who did not need an angel to appear to him to change the direction of his life but only a dream. A man who put God's agenda for his betrothed before his own hopes. A man who left his home and his business for the sake of the girl he loved and the God he loved. A man who set aside the sexual expression of his love for Mary until after Jesus' birth, just as his son would set aside the joys of marriage and sexual love for the greater joy of eternal union with his bride the church. A man who risked Herod's murderous intent and was ready to lay down his life for his bride, just as his son would be ready to lay down his life for his bride – the church. Maybe Jesus learned a thing or two from honest, solid Joe.

On Sunday we witnessed 2 men acting like Herod, murdering innocent people. But we also saw people, ordinary folk like Joseph, stepping into the responsibility placed before them, showing the best of humanity, confronting evil, even laying down their lives so that others might live. Ahmed al Ahmed. Boris Gurman who died trying to disarm one of the attackers. Alexander Kleytman, who died shielding his wife. Tibor Weitzen, who died shielding his friend. 14 year old Chaya Dadon who shielded 2 children with her body and was shot in the leg. We are instinctively moved by the sacrificial courage shown by these ordinary people. They show us the best in humanity, because they reflect Joseph's son, the only one who has lived a perfect human life. Who showed us what it truly means to love our neighbours as ourselves. Who sacrificed his life to rescue us from death and to secure for us an eternal hope and a future.

It was into a world with Herods, a world with Sajid and Naveed Akrams that Jesus came. He entered into the fullness of our human frailty. He shared in our sufferings. He is with us in our grief. With him we pray to our Father in heaven to comfort those who grieve. We ask him to heal those who are wounded in body, mind and spirit. But we also know that he came to die even for his enemies. His command is to love our enemies.² And through the apostle Paul he says to us:

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **10** Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. **11** Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. **12** Be joyful in hope, patient in

² Matthew 5.44; Romans 12.17-19, 21

affliction, faithful in prayer. **13** Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. **16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. **18** If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, ...

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.³

May we be people, who like Joseph, quietly and humbly follow our Lord's commands.

Collect for Joseph of Nazareth

God our Father,
who from the family of your servant David
raised up Joseph the carpenter
to be the guardian of your incarnate Son
and husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary:
give us grace to follow him
in faithful obedience to your commands;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

³ Romans 12:9-21