

Advent 4 sermon by Andrew 22 Dec 2019

This short homily followed a “Wild Goose” sketch from “Cloth for the Cradle” in which three local gossips in Nazareth make the most of the news they’ve heard about Mary and Joseph.

“Well, I’m not one to gossip”, but... You would, wouldn’t you. When I was in Dunbar the local newspaper was the East Lothian Courier and people said you only had to cough to find yourself in it. Not much happens out there normally, so “sheep falls in ditch” could be a headline.

I’m exaggerating of course, but only a bit. And Edinburgh’s the same, maybe worse. It’s a big village and you’re always falling over people who knew your granny or they went to school with you or whatever.

So in a small place, in the back of beyond, Mary and Joseph’s news might have been the biggest thing to happen in a long time. In fact we know it’s the biggest thing to happen not just for the gossips, but for us and the rumour that started then – did you hear about Mary? Did you hear about Mary’s boy? Did you hear they’ve gone to Egypt? Did you hear the boy’s a preacher? Did you hear that boy’s in trouble? Did you hear he’s been crucified? And you’ll never guess what they’re saying about him now... The rumour never stops.

Because it’s a great rumour, one we treasure in our hearts just like Mary did, just like Joseph did. When we’re not sure what’s the right thing to do, when something’s troubling us and we just don’t seem to be able to work it out for ourselves, Joseph reminds us that God speaks to us even while we sleep.

So here at the very beginning of our story we see a man and a woman both open to what God is going to do in them and through them. Scared almost certainly. Imagine Mary meeting an angel when she’s hanging out the washing. Imagine Joseph having to take Gabriel’s message on trust.

They both offer a great example to us because they stand in our place – you can imagine yourself as either one of them, and making their “Yes” to God our “Yes”. One of the saints said “what good is it if he be born in Mary, if he be not born in us?” So with Mary we say, again and again: “Be it unto me according to thy Word.” Whatever you’re asking of me, Lord. My answer is “Yes”. It might be a reluctant or a fearful “Yes”, but what the heck, Lord, I’ll give you my “Yes” anyway, because you had me at “hello” and I’m yours anyway.

And when life is tough. When you’re upset about what other people might think or what they might say, when you don’t want to let yourself down or let other people down or be any less in other people’s eyes than you hope you are, troubled Joseph, tossing and turning in his bed through the night shows the way of the wordless “Yes”. He rises from his bed in the morning and does what he knows he must. He acts with love and faithfulness and courage and an absolute stickability to the woman he loves, to the

unborn child committed to his care, and to the God who's spoken to him and claimed in the still watches of the night.

So can Mary's openness and Joseph's trust be ours? They can, not because we can turn on some kind of superpowers, but because God is already knocking at the door to be with us.

His name is the rumour of God for all time and in all places: Emmanuel, God-with-us. The carol "See amid the winter's snow" takes up this theme: "Sacred infant, all divine, what a tender love was thine; thus to come from highest bliss down to such a world as this." Yes, such a world as this, with all its clamour and sin, as well as its wonders and joys. And down to such a heart as yours and mine, needy and complicated and fearful, but ready to receive him because the rumour in my heart tells me I have been made for him. What good is it if he be born in Mary, if he be not born in me. Come Lord Jesus, be born in us, we pray. Amen.