

Reflection for Sunday 20th December

Reading Luke 2:1-7

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Bethlehem, the City of David, was the place for the Messiah to be born so had said the prophets. (Micah 5:2) – “But you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah for our of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”

Joseph was of David’s lineage and so he travelled to Bethlehem with Mary as she is “great with child,” to quote the King James Version. And so it was that in this place a son was born and called Jesus.

Joseph is often given little space in the thoughts of many; even through generations of Patriarchal societies Mary has been centre stage and in focus, Joseph a side figure.

It was in 1984 that the Royal Mail produced a stamp for Christmas on which Joseph is seen holding the baby Jesus a rare depiction. In this stamp he gets a little recognition. (though it was the cheapest of the series at 13p)

Despite this very minor recognition, Joseph played an important part in the story, not just being the earthly Father of the Son of God but in being the one through whom ancestry was linked to David, for from the line of David the Messiah was to be born.

In our lives we may not be people who get great recognition by the society around us but is that important? What matters, is that we play the part God calls us to play in his great historical drama.

The only other times Joseph gets a mention in the story of Jesus’ life, apart from the birth narrative, is when Jesus is taken to the Temple for his presentation at 8 days where Simeon addresses his comments to Mary and then without his name being mentioned on the occasion that Jesus was 12 and the family visited the Temple.

As we are drawing to the close of a difficult year and we hear again the familiar Christmas readings and Carols let us reflect on the people who have played an important part in the lives of this country these last 9 months. For 10 weeks we applauded the NHS staff and other key workers; we have been served in the supermarkets by staff on the frontline of encountering people; we have had shopping delivered to our doors by paid employees and volunteers; our bins have been emptied, our streets cleansed, our post delivered and so the list goes on, our teachers have been finding ways of educating children, and so many others have made a difference. In a moment think of the people who have helped you and those that you have been able to help. You may think that you have been a receiver of help rather than a giver but through your receiving others have had the joy of giving.

These local heroes may never get their pictures on postage stamps but they have played their part in an historical drama of loving neighbour.

Joseph was a key figure with minor mention. There are many others in history are you one of them, if you follow Jesus you probably are.