



SUNDAY 18 DECEMBER 2022

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

**The Parishes of:** Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington  
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

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## ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

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### 4th Sunday of Advent (A) Matthew 1: 18-24

I hadn't thought of Joe as a religious man. Over one of our walks - a habit that COVID taught us - he quizzed me about his namesake, St Joseph.

'Why don't we know more about him? He asked, looking at me as if I should know the answer. My best guess of a response was to say 'We don't need to'. It only led to more questions and no small amount of speculation. The tantalising lack of reliable copy about Joseph wouldn't surprise the very same man whose stories must have been priceless except he wasn't telling. There was no news-hound at his door wanting to do an in-depth exclusive on the home life of the Holy Family.

Yet we'd love to know more. Life in a small village like Nazareth probably meant that everyone knew everybody's business - or thought they did. Curiosity about Mary's pregnancy before marriage probably hung over her and Joseph's relationship, especially with the back street gossips you can meet anywhere. But what intrigues us and certainly my mate Joe, was what the Spirit of God was doing at a level that no one saw. It's the same today. The veneer of ordinary life disguises much of God's handwriting. Unbeknown to us the work of the Spirit goes on hidden in plain sight. It happens in you and me. It happened in Joseph in ways he was aware of and many he wasn't.

Joseph was a decisive man and a dreamer—an unusual combination. His annunciation, like Mary's, quietly created exceptional consequences. His generous intention to end his betrothal to Mary without public fuss marks him out as a thoughtful man, accepting a mystery beyond him. Taking off to Egypt because of a price on the infant Jesus' head, making a home for the astonishing young girl he loved with the son that wasn't his but was everyone's. Everyday life was probably just that, as Jesus grew in wisdom and grace.

Jesus asks us to call God 'Father'. His constant reference to his heavenly Father throws up the fascinating flight of fancy about how much of Joseph's fathering led to 'Father' being the best way to teach us something of the loving face of God.

Protector, mentor, breadwinner and carer, Joseph was beyond doubt exceptional. Our lack of detail may be a lesson to each of us. What we accept as our duty and responsibility, the ordinary, the messy and challenging episodes of our days, can turn out to be the humdrum and essential movements of God's presence within and among us. We get on with things, as Joseph did, playing our part to the best of our ability. We are the stories God tells.



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### **Pope Francis on Spreading the Gospel**

The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? If we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence. Standing before him with open hearts, letting him look at us, we see that gaze of love which Nathaniel glimpsed on the day when Jesus said to him "I saw you under the fig tree" (*John 1:48*). How good it is to stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply to be in his presence! How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life! What then happens is that 'we speak of what we have seen and heard' (*1 John 1:3*).

The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realise ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others.

- *The Joy of the Gospel* para 264