

ADVENT 4C

No doubt it was proper chaos at Gatwick airport on Friday due to a mysterious drone. It was bedlam for immigrants going home for Christmas and for people from here jetting off to a well-earned break. I just wonder if God is telling us something through all this confusion. Surely Christmas is more about staying at home than getting away. One of the songs on my Christmas CD is entitled 'going home for Christmas' and the singer is really looking forward to being at home where, he says 'his heart belongs'.

We see where Mary's heart belonged. She couldn't wait to be with her cousin Elizabeth. The Gospel says that 'she went as quickly as she could' to visit her. The meeting reinforces elements of family life we seem to be losing today. Sending Christmas cards is one thing but, like Mary and Elizabeth, we also need to meet each other in the flesh a bit more often - and I don't just mean at funerals or weddings. Social media gives the impression we're keeping in touch but it's a very poor substitute for the real thing - that is meeting face to face.

This specially applies to home life. If parents don't spend quality time with their children, then something needs to give. Being a father or mother in the biological sense is one thing. But what proves your mettle is being there for your children during their formative years? A disturbing newspaper article I read recently said that many youngsters feel more at home with their peers than with family. Parents who never give their smart phones a rest, for instance, can irk their children no end. One little boy in year one said recently: 'I hate my Mum's phone, I wish it was never invented'. I know perfect families are the stuff of fables but parenting can't be left to chance. You only get one shot at it. Without faith in God, however, family cohesion can be an uphill struggle.

Mary and Elizabeth were women of sturdy faith. Unlike her husband, Zachariah, Elizabeth didn't doubt the Angel who said

she would conceive even though past the age. Mary also took on board the angel's Gabriel's words who said she would conceive without human intervention. Some people are dismissive of all this because they say it is biologically impossible. But they forget what the Angel Gabriel said to Mary, 'nothing is impossible to God'. Some people only believe what can be scientifically proven. They even doubt that Jesus worked miracles. Our Lord once asked St Peter, who was a master fisherman, to cast out his nets in a place where he knew there were no fish whatsoever. Against his better judgement he gave way to Jesus saying 'at your word, Lord, I will let down the nets' and we all know what happened – the boats nearly capsized with the size of the catch. Now that's the faith which Jesus wants families to have. Mary had it and it saw her through all difficulties – so too Elizabeth.

Elizabeth said to Mary; 'blessed is the fruit of your womb.' May we always see offspring as blessings from God and place family cohesion at the top of our agenda. May the holy family of Nazareth be our inspiration and guide?