

ADVENT (4C)

If you remember three years ago there was chaos at Gatwick airport due to a drone hovering overhead. It was bedlam for people jetting off for a bit of winter sun. That said surely Christmas is more about staying at home than getting away. One of the songs on a Christmas CD I have 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 these days. Covid 19 hasn't helped. Sending Christmas cards is one thing but, like Mary and Elizabeth, we also need to meet each other in the flesh less sporadically - not just 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 like Mary and Elizabeth.

This specially applies to home life. Parents need to spend more quality time with their children. Those four little boys who tragically lost their lives in a house-fire in London were left alone in the house at the time. It was heart-breaking. Being a father or mother in the biological sense is one thing. But what proves your mettle is being there when they're small. But being at home also means giving them quality-time. Parents who never give their smart phones a rest, for instance, can really get to their children. One little boy in year one was overheard saying: 'I hate my Mum's phone, I wish it was never invented'.

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 question that Jesus worked miracles. Our Lord once asked Peter to cast out his nets in a place where he knew, as an experienced fisherman, 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 individuals and 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.' Wouldn't it be great if every mother could hear those words from her spouse, her family and friends? May the life-giving message of Christmas find a home in our hearts making it a joy-filled time for all of us?