

Expectant Mary and troubled Joseph



This month's reflection is a picture rather than a text. It is a mid-15th century panel of a heavily pregnant Mary with a troubled Joseph looking over her shoulder. The biblical background to this picture is Matthew 1.19 - 21: "Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, but he will save his people from their sins."

An apocryphal New Testament book elaborates: "Joseph smote his face, and cast himself down upon the ground on sackcloth and wept bitterly, saying: with what countenance shall I look under the Lord my God? And what prayer shall I make concerning this maiden? For I received her out of the temple of the Lord my God a virgin, and have not kept safe. Who is he that have ensnared me who have done this evil in mine house and have defiled the virgin? Is not the story of Adam repeated in me?"

We are invited to wonder with Mary and Joseph and, with them, look forward to the fulfilment of God's plans and promises which go beyond our understanding.

Anonymous C15 panel in the National Museum of Art, Washington DC.