

Children of Men reflection – Advent 4A 2025

Matthew 1.18-25

We are going to watch a short excerpt from a film that draws on the nativity story, but in a very different setting.

The film is 'Children of Men', and it's set in 2027 in Britain. Humanity is on the brink of doom. Worldwide, human fertility has come to an end. No new human has been born for 18 years. Society is in despair and is self-destructing. Refugees are being scapegoated for all manner of social problems and are rounded up into violent and squalid deportation camps.

The excerpt we are going to see is set in one of these camps. A young woman has somehow, miraculously, conceived, and is being escorted to a safe place to have her baby. In the middle of the most frightening and hostile environments of the film, the baby has arrived. The camp is on the brink of armed revolt, and has been infiltrated by a political group that knows about the baby and wants to use it for their own ends. In the midst of all the turmoil, the presence of the first baby anyone has seen for 18 years becomes for a moment a sign of hope and wonder.

Watch clip, 5 mins

For a brief fragment of time, peace breaks out, as all those who witness the child are stilled to worship and wonder by the first sign of hope they've had in years. What child is this? What hopes rest on her shoulders? The baby is a black girl...child of a refugee...powerless – and yet – merely by existing and being recognised, she has the power to provoke wonder and peace.

And while we, rightly, have our focus on the baby, and the frightened and feisty mother who carries her, and while we are careful to avoid making the male character the main hero of this story, our Gospel reading today from Matthew invites us to give thanks for the protecting, guiding one who leads the woman and the child to safety.

A type of Joseph, this character knows that his own hope and the hope for the future of the world is bound up in the reality of this baby. Setting aside his own safety, and curbing the impulse to run away, he uses his own body to shield the mother and child.

In our Gospel story, Joseph had resolved to walk away from Mary's disgrace – kindly, and reasonably – nobody would have blamed him. But the world needed this baby, and Mary needed support, not only for the birth but for the risky and dangerous time ahead as refugees in Egypt.

Joseph heard the call of God through the angel and obeyed – tying himself to Mary's trouble, protecting the life growing within her for the life of the world.

On Wednesday some of us reflected on how we can become those who put out their hands to others, to accompany and share in someone else's difficult journey. Today, as we reflect on the Scripture, we will mull further on the character of Joseph, and we are going to pray in two ways.

Slide:

Reflect: Who needs God's help? What's a situation you're aware of where someone needs to step up for the sake of another?

At Joseph's house: Light a candle and pray for a situation that needs guidance, courage and protection. Pray that the right people will heed the angel's voice and the call of God, however it comes to them (or us).

Reflect: Who has made safety for you, and has been by your side when you've needed it most? Who in our society are doing the difficult work of shielding and accompanying today?

At the tree: Hang a decoration on the tree, giving thanks for those who have created safety for you at different times of your life, and praying for the work of those who accompany others in this season, even at cost to themselves.