

Many of us have been brought up knowing the Christmas story – perhaps we know it too well and we wrap it up in cotton wool and have a romanticised image of the young couple and their baby. However, do we stop and think what it must have been like for the people involved?

Fortunately, there are many good books (and preachers!) who help us unwrap the Christmas story. Some such books are published by CWR who produce an Advent Study Guide every year. In our recent Men's Breakfast discussion, we considered the following thoughts taken from "A Strange Christmas" by Krish Kandiah.

Joseph's whole life must have seemed as if it had come crashing down as he thought his fiancé had betrayed him. However, he did accept that he and Mary were to be part of God's plan. But even when he accepted that he was to be the earthly father of God's son, it was not easy. There were threads of suspicion, divorce, adultery, a possible death sentence, shame, disgrace, poverty, exclusion, embarrassment. These were all part of the Christmas story. God used the most traumatic of circumstances to bring grace and His presence into the world. As well as the great plan of Salvation, God also understands the "mess" that our lives can be in, so let's give thanks for God being "there" for us.

Some of the following prayer suggestions are taken from "A Child is Born" by Abby Guinness, and others were inspired by Gillian Downey who led our Advent Stay and Pray.

Let's give thanks for:

- God's plan of salvation, "at just the right time ...."
- Mary and Joseph's willingness to be part of God's plan despite the cost
- The freedom we have to worship and to speak to others of what Christmas is truly about

Pray

- that hope would be born in those who feel that they have nothing to look forward to this Christmas
- for those we know who feel like they are in the "dark", or who are waiting for answers
- for those suffering injustice, and for those in our country and around the world who aim to protect people by establishing and upholding our legal systems (remember the work in this area by the International Justice Mission and BMS World Mission).
- for those who want to know God, that they would be drawn to Him through Jesus
- for those living in humble circumstances that the kindness of others would bless them this Christmas
- for those you know suffering with grief, or loneliness, particularly at this time of year.
- for peace today, within our families, our community and across the world.
- for the work of the Street Pastors as they go on patrol from 10 p.m. to 3.30 a.m. on Saturday nights to care for, listen to and help people who are out on the streets.