



**PASTORAL LETTER  
OF THE  
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY  
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM  
FOR THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY, 28/29 DECEMBER 2019**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

*The angel of the Lord appeared in a dream...so Joseph got up and went.*

As we continue to celebrate with joy the birth of our Saviour, in these days following Christmas, our attention turns to the Holy Family. It was part of God's plan from all eternity that the unbegotten Son of the eternal Father should be born the son of Mary. It was central to God's plan that Jesus should be brought up under the watchful eye of two loving parents, Our Lady and St Joseph.

At this time of the year, when families gather together, it is good to recall that Our Lord knew family life intimately. The God who is love first experienced human love in the womb of his mother and, at his birth, in the embrace of his parents. This holy child, who would carry the burdens of the world in the shape of the cross, was carried in the arms of Mary and Joseph – just as every baby needs to be held and cherished.

St Matthew's Gospel reminds us that life was far from straightforward for the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. After the long journey to Bethlehem and their struggle for accommodation they had to pass through dangers and uncertainty before they could return to Nazareth. Jesus experienced all of this as a child – the hurried journeys as refugees to find a place of safety for a while.

In all of this, St Joseph played a pivotal role. He was confronted with difficulties and challenges as well as the need to make a decision for the good of the whole family. We are told that on two occasions he dreamt that God's messenger spoke to him – once to warn him of the danger ahead and a second time to reassure him that the danger had passed.

Joseph listened to the angel's message, just as Our Lady had listened at the annunciation, and he believed. He translated his belief into action: *The angel of the Lord appeared in a dream...so Joseph got up and went.* On two occasions, for the good of his family, he listened and he immediately responded to the prompting of God.

As we reach the end of another year it can be helpful to pause and look back over the decisions that we made in 2019, as individuals or as families, and at their outcomes. Did we try to pray about them, perhaps reflecting on the messages that come to us from within the Scriptures or from the advice of those we trust? Did our decisions produce good results for ourselves or those for whom we are responsible? We can learn from these experiences, just as St Joseph must have learnt from the decisions he needed to take.

As we look ahead to a new year we can make it our resolution to bring all our decisions to prayer and to reflect on them through the Scriptures. This is the Year of the Word which we are celebrating under the title *The God Who Speaks*. The story of St Joseph is a powerful illustration of God's desire to speak his love and truth into our lives, if only we will listen.

On this Feast of the Holy Family - and as we try to respond to the God who speaks to us in his incarnate Son, Jesus – I want to share with you this helpful insight from our diocesan co-ordinator for Marriage and Family Life. It encourages us to be as kind and gentle as St Joseph when we are making decisions – advice which I will do my best to follow this coming year:

*Today's readings challenge us to listen sensitively to each other; to be prepared to let go of our own desires and to be deeply aware of each other's thoughts and feelings as we make decisions together. For this we need to ask the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to the gifts of compassion and understanding, courage and hopefulness.*

We pray for all the families of the Archdiocese today – and for ourselves as a diocesan family, faced with challenges and opportunities in the year ahead, but confident that, if we listen to the God who speaks, our decisions can bring us his joy and his peace.

May the Holy Family of Nazareth help us all, this new year. With my prayers for you and kindest wishes this Christmastide

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bernard Longley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠Bernard Longley  
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the 20 December 2019 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese on the Feast of the Holy Family, 28/29 December 2019.