

Advent Bible Study 2

Play Nooma 'Rain' DVD

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vidFrS-n6M4>

What's your initial reaction to this week's DVD?

How do you find it similar or different to last week's DVD?

Does the message in this DVD connect with you? In what ways can you identify with what Rob Bell is saying?

We'll try and see how this DVD fits with Advent and as we look forwards to Christmas.

Now, in thinking about Jesus's birth and the Biblical narrative that tell us of His birth – in what way (what terms) do you think of Jesus' birth?

What does it mean to you?

What springs to mind – what the first thought that you have when you think of Jesus's birth or Christmas?

We're looking from the 21st Century backwards to the events of Jesus's Birth through 2,000 years of Christian traditions and Christmas tradition all of which are layered one on top of another – it makes for a very thick lens through which to try and look at these events.

However, I'd like us to try and set aside these layers and put ourselves into the Birth narrative...as bystanders; or at times as one of the people mentioned in the Gospels....

Thinking about Joseph...

He must have felt like not just 'rain' but an absolute cloudburst had rained in on his life...

READ Luke 2: 4 – 7

Thinking just on what is written in this passage, how does it strike you?

Now, READ Matt 1: 18 – 25

How does this version strike you by comparison to Luke's account?

Joseph had a lot of question going around his head...

Perhaps wondering what Mary had been up to and with whom?

What's the right thing to do?

Joseph had no idea how things were going to pan out – he was there with a pregnant fiancée and he knew that the child in her womb was not his.

Scorn and scandal were the dark clouds that were gathering around him – he'd be desperate to do the right thing (Matt 1:19)

Now the tradition in Jewish families was for the sons to be named in keeping with a family name, or even more so given the name of their father.

Joseph called the child Jesus (cf Luke 1:59 – 63). Joseph in effect named the child after His true Father (God) – so the child is called 'Jesus' (God with us).

After this aside to the main 'story' - the pace picks up.

Herod wanted rid of all boys under the age of 2 yrs old.(Matt 2: 16 – 18)

How would you feel if you were the parent of one of those boys you knew were going to be murdered before your own eyes?

How do we square this level of mindless slaughter with the images of snowmen, reindeers and little fat robins that usually associated with Christmas?

If Joseph's life (let alone Mary's) life hadn't had enough shocks...there's more of the cloudburst to come...

READ Matt 2: 13 - 16

The home that Joseph and Mary had known and planned on return to perhaps with Mary still pregnant or with the new baby was going to become a distant dream.

How might you feel, if you suddenly had to become homeless?

Not only homeless, but the place where God tells you to run to for safety is the country that your country has had to say the least a checkered history with.

What level of uncertainty might Joseph (and Mary) have had about fleeing to land of one of their country's bitterest enemies?

What sort of things may have gone around their minds? (A home, food, safety, work, nurturing of themselves and Jesus)

When they went to Egypt – they did not know if they would make it to Egypt, how long they would live there or whether they would ever see Nazareth again.

For some Christians in the world; in for example, China, Egypt, Pakistan and Uganda this is the reality of their Christmas – refugees on the move, running from the authorities of their homes hoping to find safety.

For them they may be holding to a sense of God's arms around them – leading them through the storm, listening for and listening to words of comfort from the Father as he leads them, as Rob Bell led his child to a place of safety.