

In reflecting on today's readings, two central themes stood out to me: our call to surrender to God's plan, and the prophesied name of Jesus—Emmanuel—meaning *"God is with us."*

In today's Gospel from Matthew, Joseph has every social and legal right to abandon Mary after discovering her pregnancy. Yet, in a dream, he hears the angel's words: *"Do not be afraid to take Mary, your wife, into your home."* Joseph obeys, even though this choice runs counter to cultural norms and personal expectations. He is given no explanation—only an invitation: *Do not be afraid.*

Joseph does not overcome his fear by understanding everything; he overcomes it by trusting enough to move forward anyway. His acceptance is not blind submission, but a profound surrender to mystery. He surrenders fully to God's will. Richard Rohr often writes that transformation begins with disorder, and this truth is unmistakably present in today's Gospel. Joseph's world is undone, his plans collapse, and his sense of control evaporates. Nothing about this moment is neat or predictable. And yet, it is precisely here that God enters—not in the clarity of answers, but in the courage to remain present when life no longer makes sense.

This call to surrender and presence is not confined to the figures in Scripture; it is a call we encounter in our own lives. We, too, are invited to be present in the midst of chaos—to meet God not through certainty, but through disruption. I experienced this personally during the premature birth of my son. The birth plan we had carefully prepared was suddenly irrelevant, replaced by a highly medicalised and uncertain experience. In those moments, we were required to make significant decisions without guarantees or clear outcomes. And it was precisely there, in the disruption and vulnerability, that I encountered God's unexpected presence.

In the days following Zachary's birth, I was visited by a pastoral care worker. I was fragile and distraught at the thought of leaving the hospital without my newborn. I pretended to be asleep, hoping to avoid conversation, but she came in anyway and quietly sat beside me as I rested. Eventually, I allowed myself to speak. It became a conversation I did not know I needed—an unexpected encounter with God's presence. Through this, I learned that encountering God's presence does not mean erasing human complexity; rather, God enters deeply into it. Faith does not promise control, but companionship. The name Emmanuel—*"God with us"*—is not merely a title for Jesus, but a revelation of

how God chooses to be. God is with Joseph in confusion, with Mary in vulnerability, and with each of us in the unresolved spaces of our lives.

Today's Gospel encourages us to ask: Where are we being called to trust without full understanding? Can we believe that God is with us even when our plans unravel?

Like Joseph, we are invited to wake from sleep—not into certainty, but into faith. To act with tenderness. To accept that God's greatest work may be unfolding in ways we did not choose, yet are still called to receive. And perhaps this is the deepest hope of Advent: that God does not wait for life to be settled or explained, but enters precisely where it is fragile, unfinished, and real.