

Great expectations...

The day is approaching fast. And preparation, fellow festive-friends, is everything. Every space, drawer, nook and cranny of my house has been stuffed with stocking fillers, wrapping paper and decorations. I have lists about my lists, and a schedule that is military in precision. Happy children, a well fed family, and domestic bliss with a Frank Sinatra soundtrack – perfect.

But who am I kidding? I do this every year, you know; thinking I will be ahead of the curve. (When does that curve begin, I ask you? May?) I indulge in idealistic notions of a soft-focused and perfect family time together celebrating the cute baby Jesus.

But life is messy – and my family are as well. I'm frankly often more frazzled than fabulous after all the buying, wrapping, nagging, cooking, and cleaning. I love Christmas and all the fuss and fun, but every year I wonder why there is so much pressure around this one holy-day? And what about those for whom a 'perfect' Christmas (tables heaving with yummy food and toys under the tree) can only be a dream. My stresses are nothing compared to theirs.

I can't help but think about Mary, heavy with the expectation of her first baby and all that it must have meant to her. She would never, in her wildest dreams, have imagined the kind of cluttered, consumerist chaos we have turned her special day into. Those of us who have had a baby know it is one of the most important, and difficult days, of our lives, but there Mary was – young, innocent, without so much as a roof over her head, animal house-guests and anything but a sterile maternity ward. Talk about a messy family life!

I am sure Jesus was a cute baby – I mean, all babies are cute in their own shrivelled way, aren't they? But he was normal too. That means he must have screamed,



burped and fed almost continuously like any other little child. And Mary probably felt as worried, tired, insecure and inadequate as any other new mother does ... but she also knew that this baby was a special blessing.

Even if the feeling doesn't last, at some point I'm sure that all mothers think their children are angels, but very few have angels actually turn up to announce the birth of their child. Because of this, Mary knew Jesus was a world-changer who was going to offer peace, forgiveness and hope to all people. Bringing him up to be all he could be was the most significant thing she would ever do.

All these years later, I look at my own children and hope they will learn from Jesus and change the world too. I hope they will help the poor and lonely, care for others and share the love of God as they go about their everyday lives. Bringing them up and encouraging them to be all they can be is the most significant thing I will ever do.

Christmas might well be stressful or messy again this year, but perhaps that's normal and to be expected. It was certainly not a tidy, well-organised day for Mary, after all. So why not take a break from the giblets and gadgets for a second and let your Christmas be disrupted and disturbed by a unique baby with his message of hope. Messy, yes ... but marvellous too.

Mary's Song

This is the famous song that Mary sang to God in her response to the wonderful news she was going to give birth to God's son. It's found in the Bible in Luke 1 :46-55

“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their
inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

New International Version



Your Family Charity

Care for the Family has been supporting and encouraging families in the UK since 1988. Its family-building events have been attended by over 320,000 people and many more have been helped through special initiatives - including stepfamilies, bereaved parents and those parenting alone. Founded by best-selling author and speaker Rob Parsons, the charity is committed to strengthening family life and helping those who face family difficulties.

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