

Are you ready for Christmas? That's the question I get asked more than any other in the days or even weeks leading up to today. Are you ready for Christmas?

I imagine that people mean: have I done all my shopping? Have we got food enough for everyone? Is the house decorated? Did we buy the tree? Have we done all our cards? Are you ready for Christmas – in this sense of having all the stuff done, everything together and good to go for the big day.

But I wonder whether the characters in the story were ready for Christmas? What do you think?

Mary and Joseph – well. they knew that they were going to have a baby, of course. There had been certain tricky moments when the news was first announced – but it all came together in the end. But were they ready for their baby to grow up to be such a controversial figure that we are still talking about him today 2000 yrs later? I am not so sure. Were they ready for Christmas?

The shepherds – they were just honest guys minding their own business. Suddenly they get the message that something's occurring and they come running into town. What did they think 30 yrs later when they heard the baby they'd seen in the first few hours of his life, come as a man

riding into Jerusalem and making quite a stir? Were they ready for Christmas?

The wise men – well, they knew something was up as they had been following the star. Whether they thought it would lead to a baby is another matter. Going to see the grown up King Herod may have seemed like a smart idea, but they obviously realised he was up to no good. They certainly didn't go back that way. And the gifts they brought – hardly the kind of things that would be useful for a baby and his young mum: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Were they ready for Christmas?

The Baby - I love the traditional crib scene – all the characters gathered round, the baby centre stage and very peaceful – whoever met a baby who didn't cry and bawl and scream? "The little Lord Jesus no crying he makes" sounds to many people like wishful thinking rather than the real deal.

But as we look at that scene and reflect on the characters we see there, we might ask ourselves are we ready for Christmas? Are we really ready?

It's lovely isn't it at Christmas time to hear everyone's news. Do you have those round robin letters that tell you which exam this child you hardly ever see has passed with distinction and which exotic holiday that family you never get together with any more has been on this year? Obviously that's a rather cynical view of these things. I do really enjoy hearing what's going on in our friends' lives. I am honestly delighted to know the ups and downs of the

little person we agreed to be godparents to all those years ago and to have a sense that they are doing OK.

As we look at the traditional crib scene, I wonder therefore if we are really ready to engage with this baby – imagining 30 yrs or so of those kinds of Christmas letters from Jesus' mum and dad, Mary and Joseph – or M and J as they sign themselves now.

- Jesus (12 now) lost at Passover this year – great commotion but all alright in the end. Perhaps you'll join us next year? Love M and J
- Jesus (30 now) Teaching going well – people love his stories. Big hoo haa at that wedding. Turned water into wine. Still healing the blind and the deaf. How is that leg of yours coming on? Must see you and catch up next year. Love M and J
- Jesus (33 now) an interesting year. Went travelling to Jerusalem. Bit of bother with the authorities. Arrested. Tried. Crucified. Risen. Ascended. All looking good though... his mates are carrying on the good work. Must try and get together. Don't know where the time goes. Love M and J

Are we ready for Christmas? Are we really ready? Let's just take a moment or two to think about that for ourselves and reflect on it while we sing our next song. And let's remember that the baby, God's special gift to the world, became a man. A man who in his life and death would change everything. I wonder if Mary, Joseph, the

shepherds and the wise men were really ready for that? And more to the point, I wonder if we are!

There are some little books with the Christmas story in for the children as a gift in our 175th Anniversary Year, and some little booklets for the grown-ups. Please do take one if you'd like. It's our gift to you this year. And ... it might give you something further to think about.