

And so we wait. Many years ago we took our garden scythe to the blacksmiths in Stagsden to be mended. He offered to bring it back, never having visited Turvey Abbey before and intrigued by the thought of visiting a working monastery. Unfortunately, he came while we were at Mass, or Vespers, and I have a fond memory of watching him, scythe-over-shoulder, marching up and down in the passageway between Ravenswood House and the Chapel looking for a way in. I think in the end he realised we were at prayer and left the scythe outside our front door, the grim reaper obviously thwarted by prayer. But he's back and stalking our corridors again, in fact he's never gone away but the coronavirus sharpens our sense of fragile mortality and brings to the surface some very primal hopes and fears – essentially our hope to live forever and avoid death, and we will do just about everything we can to ensure we're the ones to survive and others do not, clearing supermarket shelves being but a first instance. Mary and Joseph also faced some very primal hopes and fears; Mary has already acceded to God's startling invitation to father a child in her and now it's Joseph's turn to face an equally startling claim on him. At first he's tempted to take an honourable but evasive path in divorcing Mary quietly, but God, as always, has a better plan. Take Mary for your wife and the child for your son and so God's promises to Abraham and David are fulfilled. Joseph most probably has no idea what's really going on here, but he allows the other, deeper and contradictory voice to be heard which assails all of us in moments of crisis. And that's the voice we must listen to very carefully now as we wait for events to unfold.

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