

There's a wonderful marriage scene in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* where Levin, the bridegroom, is desperately late for his wedding to the beautiful Kitty because his old servant Kuzma had forgotten to unpack his dress-coat, his shirt and all that was necessary for the wedding – and a society wedding at that, where these things matter perhaps more than usual. He's already had a fright the night before with last minute doubts about whether he was worthy of Kitty and whether she truly loves him – not helped by his stag-night companions half-jokingly warning him of the full terrors that awaited him: no more bear-hunting if Kitty puts her foot down, and so on. So when he finally gets to the church and the altar, the only thing that keeps him going is his love for Kitty:

As for Levin he neither saw anybody or anything but kept his eyes fixed on his bride.

And this is Joseph in all the bewilderment that assails him in his betrothal to Mary, and us too in our betrothal to God. *The course of true love never runs smoothly.* It has to be tested; that is its nature; that's what gives it its meaning: the experience of a gift that is not of our doing and the whole story then of God's dealings with all that is not God, with all that is other, that makes love possible. If you don't have an 'other' you don't have love. In Joseph God fulfils the graced choice of Israel as God's people so that Jesus through this marriage can become an heir to that lineage which goes all the way back to David and beyond. Like Russian dolls, or nested realities, a series of surprises which bring us to where we are today – children of God.

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