

It's not surprising that Joseph has a dream. Who wouldn't dream, indeed, have nightmares over the position he finds himself in: his wife-to-be is with child and it isn't his own. He's torn between obeying the law and honouring Mary; between a settled life of righteousness and an unsettled life of love. He compromises and at last decides to divorce her informally, but it's hard to see how this will save her from ignominy, but his conscience, his dream, persuades him otherwise, reasserts the law of love and faith over the law of right and wrong which has come to characterise Judaism. There is a greater law at work here which precedes and overshadows any law constrained by the 'do's and don'ts' of human discourse, even that inscribed in stone. But its very risky and holds no promise of stability and 'success' in human terms; it's the journey of faith, demanded but also enabled, by love that very first commandment which encompasses all others: *You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul, and your neighbour as yourself.* The calculus is not human: not a matter of working out 'What's the best thing to do for me?' but rather 'What is the best thing for me to do for another?' David thought it was all about building a temple for God but God knows better, for this may well have condemned David to Solomon's fate where, what he can do for God, becomes something he does for himself – an aggrandisement which leads him increasingly astray. But God remains faithful and takes the risk of incarnation through a very dubious, at times, succession of people, and Joseph is prepared to take that risk, too, against his better judgement.

So we need to be careful about the judgements we, too, make and always ask that question: whose interest is it that is our ultimate concern?

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