

***Making it up as you go along!***

*Isaiah 63<sup>7-9</sup>; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2<sup>10-end</sup>; Matthew 2<sup>13-end</sup>*

*In his love and pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and varied them all the days of old.  
[Isaiah 63<sup>9</sup>]*

If you want to make God laugh - tell him your plans!

- ✠ In the part of the story of the birth of Jesus the we have read in the Gospel today is perhaps a part of the story that neither Mary nor Joseph had planned for. Who could have thought that King Herod, there by permission of the Romans, would have been so insecure in his position as to kill all the babies under 2?
- ✠ It is difficult to piece together all the dates, but it looks as if the Holy Family would have spent at least a year as refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt.
- ✠ Then they went to Nazareth: from the way Matthew tells the story it makes it sound as if they hadn't planned to go back there despite having come from there - they had already spent around 2 years in Bethlehem before the Magi arrived and so it seems that the family had perhaps planned to stay in Bethlehem with Joseph's family and where he obviously owned land - the only reason the Romans would have included him in the census (so they could tax him).

Matthew is at pains to point out how this fulfils prophecy, but you get the sense that Joseph and Mary (with a little help from an angel) were making it up as they went along!

As we move towards the end of this year it does provide a time for reflection - and as I reflect I am left with that sense of feeling like the Holy Family: that I am making it up as I go along.

What could I have done to prepare the teenage me for where God was going to lead? It seems so improbable that the path would have led here, through many positives and a few negatives, to this wonderful Church and to have the privilege of serving such a wonderful group of Christians.

The trouble with God's plan is that you only ever see it unfold in the rear-view mirror!

As we all come to the end of this year I do recommend some time looking in the rear-view mirror of our lives to see where God has led us.

There are times when we will have heard angels tell us which way to go and we could move confidently forward knowing that God was in it.

There are other times when we faced choices with no clear sense of leading or direction and we had to take a risk, yet to discover with relief that God had already prepared the way.

There may have been other times when hurt and pain may have obscured any sense of direction - never mind what may lie ahead, breathing in the present moment was difficult enough. Fear, loneliness, guilt, illness or bereavement - these may have left us feeling divorced from God, yet his care (or his sense of humour) comes into focus in the rear-view mirror!

If God left the Holy Family, with whom he entrusted His Son, to feel like that they were making it up as they went along then that is a venerable tradition that sanctifies how most of us get by in life as well as faith!

As we, both as individuals and a Christian community, prepare for 2020 (the sermon on the Epiphany will set out some objectives for us - that's for next week) let's not pretend that we can ever make or depend on plans but to trust that we will find God in making it up as we go along and that we will see in the rear-view mirror how he has led us and all to his glory and our benefit!