

Trinity 9, Holy Eucharist
Jeremiah 23:23-29, Hebrews 11:29-12:2, Luke 12:49-56
Father Christopher

Well, that was quite a reading wasn't it? Particularly for a baptism. Don't we all think Jesus came to bring peace to the earth? He is after all called the Prince of Peace. One commentary I looked at described this passage as being, in typical academic understatement, 'singularly difficult'. So what on earth are we to make of it?

Well, context is always important in working out what's going on in any bible reading. And I think a key factor for us to take into account is that at the time of Jesus's life the Roman Empire was at one of its most peaceful points; what was known as the Pax Romana. The whole of the known world was at peace. Or at least in one sense. And yet, at what cost? And what kind of peace?

Well, it may not have felt like a very just or fair world if you were a slave in one of the Empire's provinces, such as Britannia. Or were from a part of the Empire where your richest resources weren't for the use or profit of your people, but were sent back to Rome. So peace, of a kind, yes, but peace with justice? Perhaps not.

When Jesus tells us that He has come to set father against son, mother against daughter; and even daughter against mother-in-law that He has come to bring division, and that that is the baptism he has come to bring; I think, for all the hyperbole which He often used to emphasise His point, He is saying that this new faith (or rather understanding of His Jewish faith), is not a warm, fluffy set of nice ideas. It is instead something that should turn upside down our view of the world. And when effecting any change, or standing up for what is right, some people won't like it; and that will inevitably bring division.

In Mila and Kira's case, we hope of course that that won't bring division within your family. But they are being baptised into a real, living, dynamic faith.

Some people don't like it, or feel uncomfortable when I preach about the plight of refugees, thinking it too political, or when we are called to love the difficult, troubled people in our community. But our faith should challenge. It should, as the old saying goes, comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. And we will all of course be one or other of those at different points of our life.

Our reading from Hebrews gives us this wonderful list of the things people have done inspired by the faith: It describes those who through faith have conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouth of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword. Some were sawn in two, were killed by the sword, or even went about in skins of sheep and goats.

We cannot of course know what difference Mila and Kira's faith will make to them – and I hope it is perhaps more wearing of sheep skin than some of those other options – but I pray it will make a difference to them. That as girls and women of integrity they will stand up for what is right in ways we can't even dream of today. We pray that they will be kind and gentle; that they will work for the greater peace than the mere absence of war which the Roman Empire enjoyed in Jesus's time.

We believe that they will both shortly be given the gift of the Holy Spirit in their baptism and they do this in the company of all of us; and that great cloud of witnesses of all those who have gone ahead of us in the faith.

We welcome you today into that great family of the Church which spans both time and place. And we pray that you would both be full of joy and fulfilled in the Christian life that lies ahead of you.
Amen