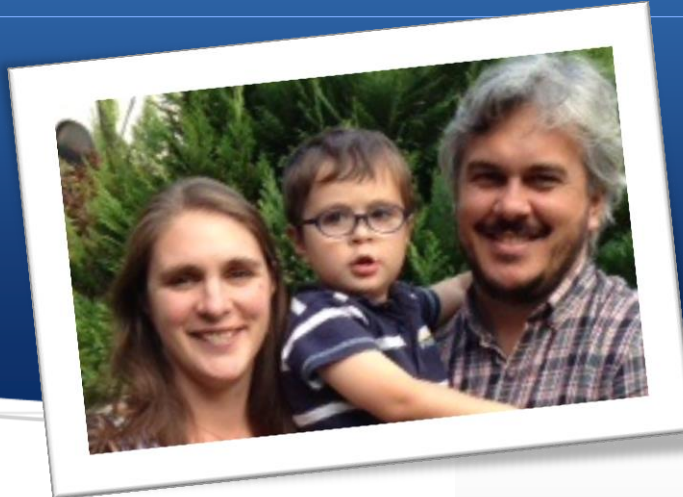


# The Vilella Family

In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.

Proverbs 16:9



But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8

Dear friends,

Thank you for your support and encouragement to us. Efraim's work with Opportunity International is going well. He has not been travelling over recent months, which has been lovely for us as a family. This is because he has been specifically involved in the strategic planning phase of Opportunity's new Stewardship office which is implementing new donor grant management systems for the organisation. The pilot phase is due to start in the New Year which will involve regular trips to Africa again.

Ruth has finished her MA and recently learnt she has achieved a merit. She is getting more involved in the local Thame community and has been trying to find some part-time work as a Health Visitor, although this is proving quite difficult due to the short amount of time we are in the UK. The Breastfeeding support group she started at the town's Children's Centre in September is going really well. She is particularly enjoying the challenge of helping train two local mums to become accredited breastfeeding counsellors, and who will hopefully lead the group once we move to Africa. From January she will be helping set up a new Mother and Toddler group with church.

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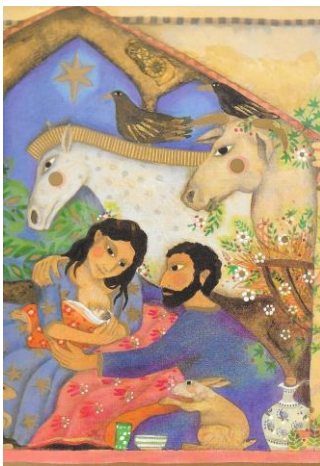
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As Christmas is nearing and we ponder on the nativity scene with Mary nurturing Jesus, it seems an apt time to share with you a little about Ruth's recent MA dissertation which was titled: "A critical investigation on the role of the church in supporting and encouraging nursing mothers as part of its holistic mission in the UK".



Motherhood and the nurturing heart of God have a clear biblical theme, and there are numerous references to breastfeeding in the bible. As we know both male and female were made in the image of God. Yet in many societies female characteristics have been devalued. We often hear about the paternal qualities of God our Father but not so much about his maternal characteristics. Theological evidence suggests that the Hebrew root of the El Shaddai compound name for God in the book of Genesis, may have been understood as: 'One mighty to nourish, satisfy and supply'. The root word 'Shad' translating as 'breast', and 'dai', meaning 'shed forth' 'pours out' and 'to heap benefits'. Holistic mission seeks to restore Shalom, by healing broken relationships on several levels; our relationships with God, self,

others, our community and creation. Encouraging and supporting the breastfeeding relationship touches on all five of these relationship levels and it is also a little part of restoring God's Kingdom here on earth.

From a health perspective, it is important to recognise that the UK has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates worldwide. This has serious implications for the nation's health and consequent cost to health care, with over 50 illnesses of mothers and infants thought to be linked to not breastfeeding. In the UK today, the mother-infant breastfeeding relationship is fraught with difficulty and UNICEF have highlighted that in the UK breastfeeding appears to be a lonely struggle with around 90% of women who start breastfeeding stopping earlier than they originally intended. This is due in part to a lack of knowledge and experience of breastfeeding amongst health professionals, academics and wider society, and also a lack of support and services to enable women to breastfeed.

Bottle feeding has gained momentum over the last 100 years with societal barriers to breastfeeding making it according to one anthropologist, a "lost cultural art." To date there have been many campaigns to communicate that breastfeeding is best for your baby, but rather than increase breastfeeding rates this has left many mother's feeling they have failed because they did not breastfeed. In reality to see any significant improvement there needs to be a change in the underlying cultural context of breastfeeding, combating a "culture of misinformation".

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Through a literature review Ruth attempted to provide a background to the cause of the low breastfeeding rates in the UK. Then with a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative primary research reviewed the breastfeeding rates and opinions of a convenience cluster sample from four different Anglican church-run pre-school outreach ministries in Oxfordshire and Kent. She then critically examined the potential ways the church could encourage and support breastfeeding.

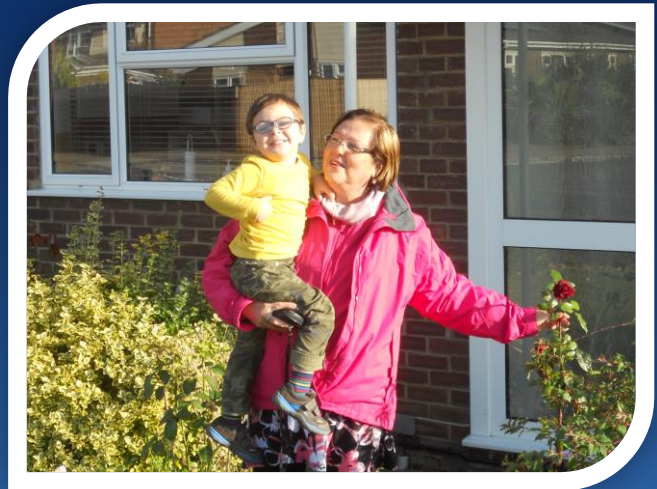
Her research concludes that the Anglican Church has a powerful and resourceful voluntary workforce of mothers who if given the opportunity and support could make a significant difference to the social context of breastfeeding in the UK. If you would like to hear more about the results of her study she will be posting a summary on our Blog and would be happy to email the dissertation to anyone especially interested.

Anyway we wish you all a really blessed Christmas. Thank you for all your prayers and support.

Love and God Bless

Efraim, Ruth e Max Vilella

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Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own  
understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.  
Proverbs 3:5-6



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