

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 25 December 2015
A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Dr Margaret Mayman
Christmas Day C
1 Samuel 2: 18-20, 26; Colossians 3: 12-17; Luke 2: 41-52

The Day is here. The time is now. And we have come out from our homes on this still summer morning, to be with one another, to reflect in community on the meaning of Christmas.

And we are gathered here in this space, Pitt Street Uniting Church, made sacred by the human search for meaning and community over some 170 years. We join those from the past, searching for the “something more” of Christmas that is found in the stories of Jesus.

This story, from Luke’s gospel, touches our hearts and stirs our imaginations in this mystical, moving season of Christmas. It announces for us that we are here again, at this moment of holy encounter.

After the busyness. After the preparations for our cultural Christmas – work year ending, gift buying or making, family travelling and gathering, culinary planning. Some of us joyful and expectant, others a bit unsettled and half wishing it was already over.

In the Christian season of Advent there is spiritual and prophetic preparation too. Preparation in waiting and watching. In claiming stillness in the midst of busyness. Journeying with Mary through the expectation of new birth, new life, a world transformed. Hearing Mary’s response to the divine entering our reality: *let it be*. Let this child be born. And let our world be not as it is now, let it be different. Let there be justice and peace and a welcome for all God’s people.

The biblical stories of Jesus’ birth are memorable but brief. At the heart of the story of Jesus’ birth in a stable, and the odd goings on of shepherds and angels, we are reminded that we can rediscover the sacred character of human existence.

Just our being together, points to the realisation that the coming of Christ at Christmas is not just personal. It is a story that belongs in community. It is a story that belongs to the universe. To our personal world, with all our misgivings and self-doubts. Our global world, with all its conflict and injustice. Our cosmos, with its infinite majesty.

For Christians, thankfully, the blessing of Christmas does not depend on our having our act together, or on having families that harmonious and happy. A Christmas like the advertising scenarios of immaculate home, happy family, gourmet dinner, and expensive gifts is not required.

American theologian Nadia Bolz-Weber wrote: *"God did not enter the world of our nostalgic, silent-night, snow-blanketed, peace-on-earth, suspended reality of Christmas. God slipped into the vulnerability of skin and entered our violent and disturbing world."*

And God loves, and has always loved this world, from the process of creation to the fulfilling of God's dream for human flourishing and planetary justice.

The Christmas story tells us that God so loved the universe, that God entered into it in the form of a gift, the gift of Jesus, so that we might trust this divine presence and experience abundant life.

The saviour comes, not to save us from hell, but to save us into life. The Christmas story tells us that God dwells in the universe we also inhabit, that we might experience the life of heaven here and now.

Theologian Elizabeth Johnson writes of Jesus's earthedness:

Born of a woman, and the Hebrew gene pool, Jesus of Nazareth was a creature of earth, a complex unit of minerals and fluids, an item in the carbon, oxygen and nitrogen cycles, a moment in the biological evolution of this planet. Like all human beings, he carried within himself the signature of the supernovas and the geology and life history of the Earth. The atoms of his body once belonged to other creatures.

Elizabeth Johnson's theology reminded me of Robert Weston's evocative poem "Out of the stars."

*"Out of the stars in their flight,
out of the dust of eternity,
here have we come,
Stardust and sunlight, mingling
through time and through space.
Out of the stars have we come,
up from time;
Out of the stars have we come.
Time out of time before time
in the vastness of space,
earth spun to orbit the sun,
Earth with the thunder of
mountains newborn, the boiling of seas.
Earth warmed by the sun, lit by sunlight:
This is our home;
Out of the stars have we come..."*

What the Christian story adds to this affirmation of our earthedness is the claim that the sacred energy of life and love – God - is with us. Jesus brings together heaven and earth. God is present in the mess and complexity of the world, redeeming and sanctifying, turning cruelty into loving-kindness, and the ordinary into the extraordinary.

This is the world-changing message of Christmas:

the 'sacred', previously perceived as holy other, is incarnated... embodied... here in this life, on this earth.

Not far away.

But born among us in blood and sweat and tears.

The humanity of God is found at Bethlehem. God became one of us that we might all become restored in God's likeness.

According to the gospels, Jesus did not come to preach about life after death and secret spiritual kingdoms. He preached the politics of our lives and our world turned upside down.

On this Christmas Day in 2015, let us reclaim that story and allow the celebration of Christmas to reenergize our lives and heal our world.

I wish you a blessed Christmas and I also wish you courage and understanding as you make imaginative political decisions, to bring about a different kind of world for everyone.

For this is why we are gathered here in this summer, sacred space, this Christmas Day.

The day is here. The time is now.