

Birth done ... now what?

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 27 December, 2020

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Gareth Thomas-Burchell

Christmas 1B

Luke 2:22-40

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

Welcome to “low Sunday”. Historically, the Sunday after Christmas is the lowest attended worship service of the year. It’s great to have you here. Many, if not most, ministers have this Sunday off. It is a time to pause after the celebrations of Christmas are over.

Or is it? Luke thinks this is a prelude of things to come. Now that the birth has happened, the question is “now what?”

When writing a sermon for the Christmas period, there is much accurate anticipation of what may happen.

But as I write, preparations have been turned upside-down for everyone’s Christmas preparations in the last 24 hours, because of the latest pandemic outbreak in the Northern Beaches area of Sydney. Though the virus hot-spot is in a relatively small area of Sydney, many people in the rest of Australia have had to adjust any pre-existing arrangement for the Christmas season – including us.

From being hopefully organised to being in disarray, is a condition that comes with unhappy but resigned acceptance. Certainly, that has been the response Australians have accepted this year, together with other responsible governments and people around the world.

The responsibility to sanitise, mask-up, keep a set physical distance, be kind and considerate, look out for others, be vigilant with one’s good behaviour ... all these protocols have become a way of life that most have adhered.

But some repeated behaviours continue unabated every year. At this time of the year, many in Australia face the annual ritual of post-Christmas regrets of having eaten and drunk too much. This, amidst the full realisation that many have gone without, and live with emptiness at many levels.

This is a sobering reminder of the excess many take during the Christmas season, and this year, we have been collectively kicked into reality, that despite our carefully laid plans, COVID-19 rears its ugly head once again, and wakes us to realising that we do not have the control we desired or thought we had. Indeed, neither do the poor or the marginalised, and that is their permanent reality.

Christmas has been different this year, not by our own design, but by something that has been beyond our control. We continue to look over our shoulder and wonder what new surprise may tap us.

Maybe that is the prompt that helps us to reflect on the world of those two young parents 2000 years ago. Mary and Joseph were having to make decisions on the run, at the same time as considering their newborn's health and safety. On top of that, as devout Jews, they had obligation and were obedient to Mosaic Law to present their child, their son, for circumcision and ritual purification.

They go to the Temple and are confronted by two elderly people, Simeon and Anna, devout in faith and whose primary purpose in life it seems, was to see and proclaim the baby Jesus as being the consolation and liberation of all of Israel and the world.

Their gathered wisdom and faith gained through a long life, was balanced with the proclamation and acknowledgement of the identity of the new born Jesus. They had lived for that moment.

Just two days after Christmas Day, are we prompted to wonder our faithfulness as we re-ponder once again the identity of Jesus, and who we are in relationship to him?

Just as this time after Christmas demands that we pause, it also gives us a prelude of what is to come. The invitation from the Gospel of Luke it to take the cue from Simeon and Anna to make known the presence of God with us, Jesus.

Today, we are the prelude of what is to come. We are the Simeon and Anna of today proclaiming Jesus as God with us.

Now that the birth has happened, the question remains, "*now what?*" Simeon and Anna give us the answers: go and tell, announce and proclaim.

God be with you as you go about doing that in Jesus name