

Reflection – Christmas Day
25/12/2024
St Cuthberts Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Isaiah 9: 2-7	Prophecy of a Child to bring Light
Isaiah 62:6-12	Salvation is coming
Psalm 96	Sing to the Lord a new song – He comes to judge
Psalm 97	The Lord is King, Let the Earth rejoice
Titus 2: 11-14	The grace of God has appeared in Jesus and helps us to live worthy lives until he comes again
Titus 3: 4-8a	Jesus saves us and pours his Spirit on us.
Luke 2:1-14	Jesus is born and shepherds see angels
Luke 2: 8-20	Shepherds see angels and then visit Jesus

Introduction

Today as we celebrate Christmas, I would like to take us back to the first Christmas and look at what we as Christians call the incarnation.

I would like to look at why the incarnation is good for us, and why it is still such a significant event we celebrate today, 2000 years after it happened.

The Incarnation

At the first Christmas there was the birth of a child. This birth was very normal in many respects, but the birth we have heard about in the readings from the bible today and on the Sunday's in Advent leading up to today, tell us of a birth that is anything other than normal.

Firstly, there is the strange conception, without a human father. Then there are the conversations between angels and relatives, and of angels with both parents Mary and Joseph. Then there is the poetic and undeniable sense of something extraordinary about to happen, in the conversation between Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, when they are both pregnant. And then, after the birth of Jesus, the multitude of angels appearing to the shepherds in the fields.

Christians believe that the birth of Jesus, is the fulfillment of the prophecies made throughout the Jewish Scriptures that God would, in the fullness of time, send a Messiah to make everything right, and to fix the world.

The prophet Isaiah put it like this:-

For a child has been born for us, a son is given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

As Christians, we call it the incarnation. Defined as God coming into the world as a human being. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church uses this first line, in it's article on "The Incarnation":-

"The Christian Doctrine of the Incarnation affirms that the eternal Son of God took human flesh from His human mother and that the historical Christ is at once fully God and fully human."

At the beginning of John's gospel we hear Jesus described in these words:-

"¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

To connect with us, to communicate God's love for us, God became a human being like us, so that we might know the way to God.

Why do we need to know God?

But why do we need God in the first place?

As human beings we crave connection. Yes, our primary physical needs are for food and shelter, but as human beings it is very clear that we have a consciousness, and we desire relationships with others.

When our two and a half year old grandson gets in trouble from his dad for doing something naughty, he immediately cries out to his mum to get affection. It is clear to me, that even from an early age, we crave relationship.

Christians believe that we are created, by God, in the image, of God, to live in a relationship, with God.

And as good as human relationships can be, none of them can ever be perfect. I think we intuitively know, that at some stage, we will not be in complete harmony, even with those we love and cherish the most.

And so, our need for God, stems from the fact that we are created by God, in the first place. There is a quote accredited to St Augustine who puts it like this:-

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

The bible tells us that as human beings we are broken and cut off from God, so we need Jesus, to restore our relationship with God.

As Christians we believe that there is only one God, and that we know that one God in Trinity. And the Trinity speaks to us of a perfect relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the incarnation of Jesus, in the life death and resurrection of Jesus, in the ascension of Jesus, we are drawn into God's good and perfect love for us. I believe it is a love we crave, and a love that only Jesus can satisfy.

What our relationship with God through Jesus does for Us

And how does knowing God through Jesus satisfy us?

I believe that knowing God through Jesus allows us to have peace. During advent we speak of hope, peace, joy and love and all are critical and important, but I think in terms of going about our daily lives, it is God's peace that enables us to navigate the ups and downs we face.

Conversely, it seems to me that if we don't accept what Jesus has done for us, then we only have ourselves to prioritize. And if we only live for ourselves, we will never find that perfect relationship God offers us, or know God's peace.

I heard someone else put it like this, "If there is no Truth, there is no freedom."

Jesus claimed to be the way, the truth and the life. If we accept the peace that Jesus offers us, then we are enabled to live with a freedom that liberates us.

And I believe it is only when we know the peace that Jesus offers, that we are better enabled to live in peace with one another.

I also believe that the Peace that Jesus offers us is not only good for us as individuals, but also for our society in general.

A little while ago I read a book called "Infidel – My Life" written in 2006 by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. A lady who grew up as a Muslim in Somalia, but fled to Holland, to escape being forced into an arranged marriage. Whilst in Holland she embraced the idea of Western Liberal Democracy and became an Atheist, hence the title of her book, "Infidel". I read recently that she has now become a Christian. One of her reasons for embracing Jesus, was that she believed Atheism wasn't adequate to equip society to function properly.

I believe that the more people there are who know the peace that Jesus offers and are earnestly seeking to live into that peace, then the better our society will be.

In Jesus we are called not only to love the God who created us, and wants to live in a relationship with us, but also, to love one another.

Conclusion

We are gathered here today to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The baby, born in a stable, and laid in a manger. Of course, Jesus grew and became who God had destined for him to be for all humanity, but Jesus could only do everything he did for us because the incarnation happened first.

I believe it is in knowing and accepting what Jesus has done for us that we, as mere human beings, can know the way to God.

The God who created the universe, the God who brings all things into being, the God who loves us so intently, chose to become a human being like us, and for us.

In his humanity, Jesus gives us as mere humans who are broken and cut off from God, a way back to God.

May we continue to not only to choose a relationship with God through Jesus, but may we continue to know the Hope, Peace, Joy and Love that Jesus offers us.

May we grasp with our whole hearts the significance of Jesus and never let go.

And as you embrace your relationship with God through Jesus, I pray that you will know and feel God's love, and that love will then overflow into the relationships you have with others.

May you all have a Happy, a Holy and a Blessed Christmas. Amen.