

CHRISTMAS EVE – Midnight Mass
ST PETERS ANGLICAN CHURCH BUNDOORA
Tuesday 24th December 2024
Fr. Stephen Monsiegnur

Readings: Isaiah 9:2-7 / Psalm 96 / Titus 2:11-14 / Luke 2:1-14

Theme: *O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.*

Isaiah 9:2-7

² The people who walked in darkness
 have seen a great light;
 those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
 on them light has shined.

³ You have multiplied the nation,
 you have increased its joy;
 they rejoice before you
 as with joy at the harvest,
 as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴ For the yoke of their burden,
 and the bar across their shoulders,
 the rod of their oppressor,
 you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵ For all the boots of the tramping warriors
 and all the garments rolled in blood
 shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ For a child has been born for us,
 a son given to us;
 authority rests upon his shoulders;
 and he is named

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ His authority shall grow continually,
 and there shall be endless peace
 for the throne of David and his kingdom.
 He will establish and uphold it
 with justice and with righteousness
 from this time onwards and for evermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Psalm 96

¹ O sing to the Lord a new song:
 sing to the Lord, all the earth.

² Sing to the Lord and bless his holy name:
 proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day.

³ Declare his glory among the nations:
 and his wonders among all peoples.

⁴ For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised:
 he is more to be feared than all gods.
⁵ As for all the gods of the nations, they are mere idols:
 it is the Lord who made the heavens.
⁶ Majesty and glory are before him:
 beauty and power are in his sanctuary.
⁷ Render to the Lord, you families of the nations:
 render to the Lord glory and might.
⁸ Render to the Lord the honour due to his name:
 bring offerings and come into his courts.
⁹ O worship the Lord in the beauty of his holiness:
 let the whole earth stand in awe of him.
¹⁰ Say among the nations that the Lord is king:
 he has made the world so firm
 that it can never be moved;
 and he shall judge the peoples with equity.
¹¹ Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad:
 let the sea roar, and all that fills it:
¹² Let the fields rejoice, and everything in them:
 then shall all the trees of the wood
 shout with joy before the Lord;
¹³ For he comes, he comes to judge the earth:
 he shall judge the world with righteousness,
 and the peoples with his truth.

Titus 2:11-14

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹² training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Luke 2:1-14

¹ In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone

around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
¹⁴ 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
 and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

SERMON.

The Gospel of St John opens with a statement that leave no room for varied interpretation; *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

Tonight, we celebrate that great mystery of the Word made flesh.

In the form of a fragile and totally dependent baby called Jesus, God has entered the world not as a divine being but a human. In this state Jesus lived and died. He felt joy and sorrow among the full range of human emotion and feeling.

What was the point, why go to such effort?

Creation, namely humanity had lost its way. It had become arrogant to the point that, even if not realising the fact itself, it had begun to believe it knew better than God. Humanity had become self-intituled to the point of abusing anything including each other - and so God's own image; that it felt was of lesser value. In Jesus God provides a model for us of how to live life in a way that is perfect. By being human just as we are, Jesus is challenged as we are yet in response to life's challenges, he never loses faith in God's love of him. Jesus never forgets from where his power to heal, his wisdom and blessings come.

Mary and Joseph have not had an easy nine months. Joseph is surprised possibly hurt when he learns of Mary's pregnancy, so much so he decides to terminate the betrothal. Mary is faced with a dilemma that socially for her time and place could hardly be worse. But each puts their trust in God's plan. Mary says yes to the angel, Joseph says yes to supporting Mary even though the child is not biologically his. The shepherds in what could only be described as an unexpected and frighteningly divine and fantastic encounter did not run scared but faced the fear and found the baby Jesus in a manger. And This is the point of Jesus.

Life always contains challenges, that is simply the way of things, but do we see these hurdles as too high, the value of return for our commitment as too low? Do we run or surrender when the destination is unclear?

Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, later the disciples and so many more who have followed Jesus have faced not just life's challenges but persecution for their faith in Jesus. If we are to do more than just admire a baby or wonderful story, If we are to gain what we can by sharing

our experience as we are called to, we too will face trials, but we are blessed by God as Mary, Joseph and the shepherds were blessed. We are strengthened by faith to resist the temptation to take the easy path that leads nowhere. This is how evil enters, by distracting us from the truth. We are empowered to say yes to God and no to sin.

We do not truly know the intricate details of the birth event other than generally when and where it occurred, but even this is open to dispute from Gospel sources. Only Luke and Matthew tell the narrative of Jesus birth, where as Mark who wrote closest to the time of Jesus, and John do not regard it as worth mentioning. But from the scriptures and other historical references we are certain the birth of Jesus is a historical reality. The birth of a child who grew into a man who walked not just with but as God among us. A man whose love for others was such that he surrendered his life to God that we might inherit the same.

This Christmas, take a moment from the eating and cheer, and remember the gifts each of us has received by the decision of others to trust God. Moving forward take some time, to seriously consider in what way as you walk with Jesus is God asking you to trust more.

May you and those you share time with this Christmas know God's blessing of peace and may the Christ child be the light that shines on your path moving forward. AMEN.