

*Sermon for Christmas Day (St Raphael's)*

*Based on Luke 2*

We gather to celebrate this morning. It is Christmas! This long-awaited day of celebration begins our whole season of rejoicing. From now until January the 6th, the Feast of the Epiphany, we are in Christmastide. So, merry Christmas to you all! Enjoy this season of celebration and festivity!

Today's Gospel begins the Christmas story in Nazareth, with Joseph and the heavily-pregnant Mary making their way to Bethlehem in order to be counted in the census. The journey would have been long and tiring, especially for Mary in her late-stage of pregnancy. But travel they did, and they arrived in Bethlehem. There was no room for them in the inn, but the inn-keeper offered them the stable as a place to rest, and to stay.

While in Bethlehem, Mary delivers her baby. The birth of Jesus takes place quite quickly, it's covered in two verses – the first announcing that it is time for Mary to deliver her child, and then, this: “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.”

Jesus is born and placed into the manger. This is a place of poverty, simplicity and humility, but it is also a place where he was warm, safe and protected. It was not much, but it was enough. And he had Mary and Joseph to watch over him, and to love him and care for him. One lesson we can learn from that moment in the Christmas story is to be mindful of others, and to always care for those who are in need and who are vulnerable. Let us remember our ability to be kind, and to be compassionate. Let us also remember that there are those whose lives are hard, and thank God for the organisations and people who dedicate themselves to works of philanthropy and generosity, and who help those who are in need.

And then, from that fairly private moment in the stable, we move to the world's response to the birth of Jesus. The shepherds, who were minding their own business, and their flock, in the fields, see and hear the angels in the skies above Bethlehem. The angels proclaim the good news, reassuring the terrified shepherds, “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people”. This is world-changing news, and it is good news. Jesus is born, and the shepherds are invited to witness these marvellous events – “you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth

and lying in a manger". After this, they break into songs of praise, signing 'Glory to God' and 'Peace on earth'. What they spoke to the shepherds they then proclaim to the whole world, so that the earth might resound with their joy.

The shepherds will travel to Bethlehem and see the Christ-child, which starts his revelation to humanity. Their journey into the town begins the process by which countless generations of people have been drawn to Jesus, come to know him, and have begun to learn from him. Though he is an infant in the manger when the shepherds saw him (and in our own minds when we tell the Christmas story), he will become the fully grown man who will teach his disciples to be people of love and empathy, and whose entire teaching was shaped by the love and wisdom of God, and intended to inspire and encourage us in our daily living.

While we gather for Christmas Day as an important holy day, we ought to remember that Christmas is not just one day, but an entire season that runs to the Feast of the Epiphany on January the 6th. This whole season allows us to reflect of the meaning of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, allows us to celebrate it with joy and wonder, and to carry it into the rest of the liturgical year. Hopefully, there is a part of Christmas to be found in each day - in remembering God is with us, in remembering that God loves us, and in remembering to share the love of God with those around us, through word and action, each and every day.

I wish you all a very blessed Christmas, I pray that you will know God's presence and love, and that you will take those blessings with you, and share them with those you love; today, tomorrow, and always.

Rev. Dr Emily Fraser  
All Saints, South Hobart and St Raphael's, Fern Tree  
Christmas Day  
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