

Sermon for Christmas Eve  
*Based on Luke 2:8-20 and Titus 3:4-8*

This evening is a truly special evening, and this service, an absolute highlight of the year. It is a time for festivity and great happiness. Tonight, and tomorrow, we celebrate the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. Christians have shared the good news of this story for millennia, and it has inspired generations of believers to celebrate and rejoice.

Yet the birth of Jesus seems to happen so quickly when we read the Gospel text. One verse announces it is time for Mary to deliver her child, and in the next verse, he is born, wrapped in hands of cloth, and laid in the manger, “because there was no place for them in the inn”.

This quickly covers an event of extraordinary magnitude. Jesus, who is God incarnate, is born in Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem in order to be counted in the census, in spite of Mary’s heavy pregnancy. This would have been a long and tiring journey for anyone, but especially for an expectant mother.

And then the birth-pangs begin and it is time to deliver this long-awaited baby. Finally, Jesus is born, and is placed into the manger. There was no place for them in the inn, but they have a space which was warm, dry, and would keep them safe. Jesus shares humanity’s difficulties, even from his earliest moments. He was not born into privilege, but into poverty. But he was safe, and he was loved, and those things matter.

Once Jesus is born, the universe begins to respond. First, the angels announce their good news to the astonished shepherds. The shepherds are understandably terrified at the sight of the angels, even though they have good news to share. But they listen. And they take it in. And they make a decision. “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” The shepherds faithfully respond, and go to see the newborn baby. They tell Mary and Joseph all that happened, and Mary pauses to reflect. After their visit, the shepherds leave, giving thanks to God and continuing to share the good news of Jesus’ birth.

The greatest thing about the Christmas story is that it remains continually relevant. We can celebrate it as something which happened, historically, all those years ago in Bethlehem. But it is also something which happens each and every year. Christmas

is important because it teaches us that God became human, in order that we might be drawn closer to God. God chose to become vulnerable, mortal and in need of help, just like us, so that we might be brought back to the wisdom and love of God, and into God's own family.

The letter to Titus helps us make some sense of these wonderful and strange events. God chose to become human, "not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy". This shows us the depth of God's love for us. We cannot earn our salvation, but we receive our Saviour into the world with joy and celebration, because God is merciful. Jesus, this tiny and vulnerable infant, will teach humankind how to truly live, and it is simple, yet complicated: love one another.

What we do in life is in response to God's love and wisdom – as an act of thanksgiving and gratitude. Hopefully, we live in such a way that we show ourselves to be people of compassion, empathy and grace. Because this is what Christ urges us to be, because that is how we shape the world into a Godly and kindly place.

And 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 Eve  
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