

## CHRISTMAS DAY REFLECTION 2020



Who were those people who gathered around Jesus when he was born? Is there a place for you and for me?

Let's start with **Mary**.... Mary was a young woman who lived an ordinary life in the little town of Nazareth in Israel. We first meet her when she was startled by an angel who told her that God has chosen her for a very special role – to be the mother of God's Son Jesus conceived by God's Spirit. When Mary answered "Yes, I will do what God asks of me" it was a huge moment. As a faithful Jewish girl Mary knew that God's promises made to her people generations before were being fulfilled in her... and she burst into a song of joy.... Mary was the mother of Jesus... She was also brave – it put her into a difficult position.

**There was Joseph:** Joseph was a carpenter engaged to Mary – He was a tradie and he was also a descendant of the great King David... he lived in Nazareth but his family came from Bethlehem. Joseph was faced with a dilemma when Mary became pregnant and the child was not his – It was a scandal - his honour was breached and he was shamed – he could have had her stoned and he nearly divorced her - but he was also a godly person and in a dream he was reassured and he took Mary as his wife and the child she was bearing as his son. Now with the census imposed across the Roman Empire he has had to bring her all the way to Bethlehem to be counted – It's a nightmare! Mary's time to give birth has come and they have no accommodation – all he can find is a stable out the back of an inn.

**And there are Angels:** Angels are messengers from God – usually unseen – but on that night of wonder they brought the good news of Jesus' birth.

There were **shepherds**.... They were not particularly religious men – in fact their work in the fields kept them away from places of worship. Shepherds were simply not able to

keep the Jewish ceremonial law and washing rituals. They worked with animals and people saw them as unclean.

But shepherds were alert and fit and strong ready for action. They had to be prepared for the unexpected as they peered out into the darkness around them for danger.

And there were **the wise ones** - strangers – sometimes we call them kings and they were foreigners from Persia which is modern day Iran. They were educated astronomers who studied the stars. They were rich - only the wealthy could afford to bring gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. They came looking for a newborn king because of the special star they had seen.

There were animals – No doubt a cow ate out of that manger - possibly a donkey was stabled here – I am sure there was a cat to keep the mice down... and of course there were sheep with the shepherds...

and there were two more characters that I do not have in my nativity set but after this COVID-19 year we can't leave them out.

**There is an innkeeper** – a small business-man in hospitality: He's not having to close, On the contrary it's the busiest time he can remember -the town is packed with visitors coming back for the census –

The only place he has left to offer this desperate couple is the stable out the back - its dark and smelly and cold and it looks like their child is about to be born....

The innkeeper can see Mary's distress and so he sends for **a midwife** - an experienced woman to come and help this young first time mother.. every village had a midwife -a nurse.

But who have I forgotten here?

The baby! He was called Jesus because "he will save his people from their sins" and Emmanuel which means "God is with us". The angels called him "Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord."

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I wonder: Which character in the story do you most identify with?

The young mother far from her family giving birth – or the pondering Mary thinking about what it all means and what will her baby's life be like ?

Joseph trying to care for his family in difficult circumstances....?

The angels sharing the message of God of glad tidings of great joy?

The shepherds, tough men of the outdoors, watching the skies?

The magi – educated and wealthy - seeking the truth - people from another land and culture?

The animals wondering who is this in my space?

The inn-keeper, run off his feet trying to juggle the logistics?

The mid-wife on call in the midst of an emergency?

Who do **you** identify with in this Christmas story?

Perhaps it is the family group– Mary and Joseph and the baby?

Jesus Christ was born in the stable because there was no accommodation left inside the inn – in fact in the whole of Bethlehem.

And yet he drew such a range of people:

religious people and people who are not religious

people from the nation of Israel and people from other nations -

men and women – educated and un-educated – rich and poor - influential and humble.

They all came to see the child and left praising and glorifying God and overwhelmed with joy.

The birth of a child is special. It is one of life's great moments especially for a parent but there is more to this birth:

In this child, God who made the world and gave us life, is born into the midst of the messiness of our world.

It's good news for the world especially this year with all it's uncertainty – a year of violence in some places - people on the move - a year here in Australia affected by drought and bushfires and now. this year of the COVID-19 pandemic that has rocked the world and taken millions of lives and changed how we live. This year we have learned how important relationships are as many of us have experienced a sense of isolation and loneliness and separation even from family. For some of us there has been a loss of work and disappointment when our plans went out the window. There has been a spike in mental illness and anxiety and it has not ended.

I am moved by these words by a poet called Madelaine L'Engle L'engle wrote:

*God did not wait until the world was ready.....  
God came when the heavens were unsteady  
and prisoners cried out for release.  
God did not wait for the perfect time.  
God came when the need was deep and great.  
God did not wait till hearts were pure.  
God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt  
...and God's light would not go out.  
God came to a world which did not mesh;  
to heal its tangles , shield its scorn.  
In the mystery of the Word made flesh,  
the maker of the stars was born.  
We cannot wait till the world is sane  
to raise our songs with joyful voice,  
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,  
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!*

The Christmas story is a story of hope and joy for us all!

No-one is forgotten by God. God loves us all and No-one is left out.

There is a place in the Christmas story for each one of us whoever we are and whatever the circumstances of our lives.

Christ was born for me and for you. He came to show us what human life can be and to gather us into God's family.

As a man he would killed on the cross by his enemies but he was raised by God defeating all the powers of evil and death. He saved us from the consequences of our sins.

He came for the world.

So this Christmas, receive him into your lives. His gift in the midst of everything, is hope and joy.

Let's rejoice with Mary, Joseph, the innkeeper and the midwife, the angels and the shepherds, the Wise ones and even the animals – indeed the whole creation.

God bless you this Christmas. Amen.

Laurel Barr – 25<sup>th</sup> December, 2020