

Christmas Day 2009.

David Thiem

St Aidan's 8am & Wesley 9.30am

Readings: Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 2:1-20

Theme: "The joy of a baby"

Introduction

Child-birth and tiny-tots are not one of my strong points!

Just ask Annette and maybe my now adult children.

I've survived birthing classes, although I slept through one where we had too many relaxation exercises, along with holding Annette's hand while she produced our children. Also I've even timed contractions for one parishioner many years ago when hospital staff in a small country hospital had multiple emergencies. So successful was that occasion that I still get Christmas cards from the family almost 30 years later!

This is my total sum of my knowledge on babies, hence Christmas Day services, talking about a baby born 2,000 plus years ago stretches my imagination.

I guess I'm an Australian male who is happy to 'wet the head' of a baby (doubly so for me) but not so sure about all this baby stuff.

Hence I was delighted when I found some words about Christmas, babies and faith written by a woman – Catherine Boileau – who is also a minister. I share some of her words with you as she gives a wonderful perspective to Christmas Day from a more balanced perspective!

Catherine writes:

"Giving birth is a community event. Oh, don't get me wrong.

I'm not one of these courageous souls who invites the extended family or the local television people into the labour and delivery room. In fact, I threatened my husband with bodily harm if he so much as went for a camera during our children's births. There is a reason I believe that the sign to the shepherds was a baby already born and lying in a manger, and not a pregnant woman. Poor Mary didn't need all those shepherds and wise men hanging around for the birth!

However, isn't the birth of any child a communal event? When we hear of a child born to a co-worker, a friend, relative or neighbour, don't we

also rejoice? People put signs in the front yard so that total stranger even know – ‘it’s a boy, or it’s a girl’. We send cards of congratulations and the family may well put announcements of the new arrival in the paper, because somehow we understand the miracle of a new birth is God’s gift to us all.

Why should it surprise us then, that the sign of God’s redemptive act is often the birth of a child?

For Abraham, the sign of God’s coming was Isaac. For Hannah, the sign was Samuel.

For Isaiah and the whole people of God who stood thirsting for God’s redemption, the promise again is a child. And the name for this child is Wonderful counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’

What hope Judah must have had for this child!

A child, who would one day lead the nation out of the darkness of its broken-ness and sin into the dawn of a restored covenant with God.

A child whose reign would embrace both justice and mercy and whose rule would strike a delicate balance between gentleness and strength. If the birth of an ordinary baby draws the community together in shared joy and wonder, how much more would this special child be celebrated?”

Personal Reflection

So often we, like the commercial media, tend to leave the birth of Jesus in the past. Where do 'we' fit into this picture? Deep down aren't we just a little tempted to believe that the miraculous story belongs more to Mary and the shepherds than it does to us?

Have we heard the angels call 'our name', just as they called Mary's? Have we really heard that this child is good news for us, just as he was for the shepherds?

The transforming moment of Christmas comes when we claim our place at the manger. When we realise that the Christ child has come, not just for the world, but for us. When we realise that Jesus came because of our sin, that he walked to the cross breathing our name. It is not just world peace he offers, but our peace. It is not just the world's story that needs to be changed, but our story.

It is also the humble acceptance of this gift of manger and cross, grave and resurrection that transforms us. Around the manger a new community is born. The excited shepherds share their story; a loving mother shares her son. The Magi give gifts. Rich and poor, Gentile and Jew, migrant and landowner, male and female are transformed into the

kind of 'us' possible only with the love of this child, the one called Prince of Peace.

Conclusion

In a book by Ralph Milton (p28) *Sermon Seasonings*, there is this marvellous, if a little tongue in cheek reflection on Christmas:

'It's a marvellous, wonderful, wise, loving, practical joke.

Christmas! The nativity.

There's God , down through the centuries, listening to the prophecies about the Messiah.

Some of them were wonderful and beautiful and spoke the mind of God.

Others thundered away about the Conqueror, the one who'd come in on a white horse, with sword and shield, a leader that would be better and tougher than King David.

So God gave them the gift they so badly needed. But not the gift that they expected.

It was King David II they wanted. It was a tiny baby they got. What a hoot!

They wanted power. So God gave them the power of weakness. They wanted a conqueror. So God gave them love that conquers all.

That must have been good for a heavenly chuckle or perhaps even a belly-laugh, if a belly-laugh is possible for a God who is spirit.

It was not the laughter of derision. It was the laughter of a loving, gentle parent waking up long before the kids on Christmas morning, waking up in anticipation of the face of the child when that special gift is opened, the child who receives so much more than it ever dared ask for in the letter to Santa.

And the laughter of God is the laughter of a pleased-as -punch parent who receives the Christmas thank you hug of a delighted child.

The joke comes back every year in the "Christ-Child".

A happy and holy Christmas to you all!

Amen