

Christmas Day – 2011 – 8am St Aidan's and 9.30am Wesley-DT

Theme: "To boycott Christmas or not?!" John 1: 1-14

'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling
among us.' (John 1:14a)

Introduction

We've made it to another Christmas – well done!! During parts of December I had wondered if I'd make it to this day with the variety of secular and church events that seemed too many to handle. I forgot one Intercessory Prayer Service and triple booked myself one evening, such was the Advent calendar! Sound familiar. Well relax, there is simply Christmas lunch and dinner to go and it is all over for another year!!

Bruce Prewer expresses some of the chaos leading up to Christmas far better than I do in his writing of 'A Christmas by-pass?' from his book 'Australians at Prayer' (pp152/3). In a sense Prewer is asking the question, 'Can we do without Christmas?'

Prewer writes:

“ Dear God, would you be insulted if for one year we by-passed Christmas and saved ourselves this diversionary distemper with its wasted opportunities for re-creation growth? I'm tired of Santa in every store or astride chimneys and gables, of obligatory parties and barbeques, turkey, prawns and trifles, swilled down with false cheer, of the avalanche of presents for which our cluttered lives have no real need at all.

God, help me! I'm even tired of Christmas carols, played on a busker's sax or flute or piped mercilessly through shopping malls and supermarkets.

Couldn't we by-pass Christmas? Have a moratorium on cards and wrapping paper and save a million trees?

Keep in storage those pretty lights which burn a wealth of fossil fuels? Deny the rapacious god of motorcars its annual sacrifice of human lives in bloody highway

mayhem? Couldn't we have a blank period between Advent and Epiphany? An awesome silence in which we could be still, confront our own deep thoughts, feel a neighbour's grief or joy, and maybe (O grace!) even hear your Word become flesh?"

What Prewer is saying is let us forget 'the trappings' that surround Christmas and let us centre on the true meaning.

Hence he finishes with these words:

"It has come again! Thank you, great Friend, for Christmas morning. I do not want to by-pass this!

The Word became flesh! Jesus Christ has come indeed!"

We can become so immersed in the world that we forget the true meaning of Christmas. We can also simply become too busy. Today, we need to stop, reflect and take stock of our life and our faith. God confronts us with the gift of His Son, our Lord and Saviour. This is the message of Christmas!

Middle

The reading from John 1:1-14 for this Christmas morning is often referred to as the prologue, setting the scene for the Gospel. In a sense it is more poetic than narrative in form which differentiates it from the writers of the Synoptics or first three Gospels. Mark begins his Gospel with an account of John the Baptizer, whose baptism of Jesus is the occasion at which Jesus is identified as God's beloved child. Matthew's Gospel begins with the details of Jesus' genealogy and Joseph's doubt, and Luke's account begins with the vivid descriptions of angelic appearances, first to Mary and later to the shepherds. Both Matthew and Luke make it clear that Jesus is known as the Son of God, even at his birth. In the fourth Gospel, however, divine identity is clear from the inauguration of time. This is how Scripture begins in Genesis 1:1. God was, is and will be – it is a theological statement – God is from the past, is part of the present and will be into the future.

'The Word' is linked into this. Greeks used the term 'word' not only for what was spoken but also what was unspoken – that which was in the mind, the reason. When the Greeks applied this to the universe they meant the rational principle that governs all things. The Jews on the other hand, used this terminology as referring to

God. Thus John uses a term here that has meaning both to the Jewish and Greek hearers and helps them to better understand who Jesus is and where he fits in. The Word was distinct from the Father, yet 'with God and was God'. Jesus was a separate entity but was still God.

Right from the outset of John's Gospel there is no doubt about who had become flesh – Jesus was of God, Jesus was one with God. A deep concept as we come to worship the Christ child this Christmas Day. But we need to know why we are here, worshipping today. It is not simply part of the pageantry of Christmas, the tinsel and lights, but rather our Lord and Saviour's birth that we celebrate.

Conclusion

Today is part of our faith experience – what we believe and why we celebrate this day.

It is also the basis for our living faithfully in our God given world challenging some aspects of our societal values due to "The Word becoming flesh and living among us."

1. Within the Uniting Church we have this strong social justice ethos that calls us to care for the outcaste, those on the fringe of society, and to offer support, love and care in the name of Christ. Not only do we exercise this through our Uniting Care Agencies but also through the myriad of congregations and small groups that offer hope to so many individuals across the nation and overseas.

2. Within the Uniting Church there is a strong movement for reconciliation between marginalised peoples. With the recognition of the first peoples of our nation now part of our preamble to our constitution within the Uniting Church and our support of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Congress there are continuing close ties with our indigenous brothers and sisters in Christ. Nationally and internationally the Uniting Church is part of the Ecumenical Working Group on Israel/Palestine relationships, seeking a peaceful resolution to the ongoing tensions in that part of the world. Also we have strong shared relationships with more than 30 other overseas churches so that we see ourselves as more than simply an Australian church.

3. With asylum seekers to our country, we as the Uniting Church continue to advocate for a humane treatment of all who come to our shores seeking a new life, free from persecution, war and abuse. We recognize today that Jesus' family fled to Egypt for fear of their lives and stayed in that country until it was safe to return to their own land. May we as a country offer hope to those seeking a refuge.

All of these things come out of our Christian conviction of Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, and the forgiveness and new beginnings we have experienced through our faith and our desire that others may find the same joy, love, peace and hope we have experienced.

As Prewer says, "It has come again! Thank you great Friend,
(God), for Christmas morning. I do not want
to by-pass this! The Word became flesh!
Jesus Christ has come indeed!" Amen.