

Sunday 22nd January 2006 Robert Lamerton
St Philip's O'Connor

EPIPHANY 3B

Jesus preaches "the Kingdom of God has come near"

Last Wednesday 18th Jan. was the 3rd anniversary of the fires which killed four people and destroyed 500 houses in southern Canberra. It was a time of reflection and some protest recalling a terrible event. We hope that in remembering we will be alert to preventing a repeat of the disaster.

On Thursday this week 26th January it is Australia Day. Another anniversary! A day when we think of how Australia was formed. It is also a day of mixed feelings because it recalls the beginning of white settlement and a long period of disenfranchisement and negativity towards the indigenous people of this land. It may not be the right day on which we should celebrate for that reason! It may be more appropriate to observe the anniversary of Federation; Or the emergence of our aboriginal people when they were given the right to vote for the first time in their own land. Nevertheless Australia Day is at present the anniversary we celebrate.

I like to remember that also on 26th January the people of the Republic of India ALSO celebrate! They celebrate on Republic Day the formation of their own government after hundreds of years of British Rule.

Now I'm not against the British rule because (in case you hadn't guessed) I'm a relative of some of those English people. I'm grateful to have been born in Australia AND I'm grateful that the nation's first inhabitants did not decide to deport my ancestors as illegal immigrants!

Well that all started because I wanted to talk about "Anniversaries".

Anniversaries give us the opportunity to look at our history, to talk about the issues we face — **AND** make decisions about how we live our lives in the future.

I hope that in years to come Karen and Damian and the family and friends of little Jorja will remember this day as the anniversary of her baptism. Mostly we remember the funny things or the bad things that happen like when the priest dropped his book in the font or forgot the baby's name or spilt wax on the godmother's dress and so on. Well not today! I want you to latch onto the good things; how maybe someone from the congregation made you welcome OR how you for the first time in a while said a prayer or wondered about God OR really thought about the promises you made on Jorja's behalf. I want you to remember something which you will take away in your mind and which you will share each year on the day half way between 18th and 26th January.

I hope you will recall that on this day you and Jorja began a journey with God which unfolds in a most wonderful way.

Anniversaries give us the opportunity

- to recall
- to relive

- and to reflect.

In our readings today we heard of Jonah the ancient prophet going to call the great city of Nineveh to repent. Now the great size of the task made him want to "chicken out" or "freak out" as they say in the classics! But somehow he was preserved and carried out the task.

Repent! The word is *metanoein* which means simply to "change one's mind" (Some people seem to do that often!) But the word in the New Testament seems to take on the much stronger meaning from the Old Testament word *shubh* and comes to mean "to turn back" or "to come to one's senses" or a deliberate turning away from one's sinful past and towards God. Repentance is NOT just a nice idea! it is about reordering our priorities, reorganizing our life and with the outcome of a change in conduct.

In the story of Jesus today he uses the word as he begins his ministry in Galilee, not in any great city amongst politicians and business leaders but out in a place where the people are thought to be country hicks and religious half wits! He comes "proclaiming the good news of God" or more likely "the good news FROM God" about God's coming among them. The Galileans might have thought they were dreaming because they had always been told that they were religious nobodies. So here is Jesus telling people who believed that God was not interested in them that he had GOOD NEWS FROM GOD FOR THEM!

Don't ever write yourself off! Because God never does!

Jesus said "the time is fulfilled" or "Times up!"

The Jews of Jesus' day had developed an idea that God had determined a time that must elapse before the coming of his Kingdom. Jesus is just reflecting this thought and saying "Now is the time!"

Every day (every moment of every day) we have the opportunity of responding to God.

"the kingdom of God has come near" suggests that Jesus saw his work as proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom. Dr D. E Nineham says "More significant is the question how far, and in what sense Jesus believed the kingdom to have actually arrived during his earthly life". Obviously those who wrote about Jesus witnessed the life of God at work. What we see in Christ is the fullness of the nature of God's rule! Something which should inspire us

and to which we should aspire!

But to do that Jesus calls us to

Repent

and

Believe the Good news.

Finally I would like to draw your attention to Jesus' call of Simon and Andrew and then James and John (the sons of Zebedee) who were not poor in the same sense that others were. They had work, a boat, and a livelihood and would have been like small to medium businessmen. I think it is this which makes their call and response the more remarkable because they do actually leave something behind.

But they are also the beginning of the group of disciples who will share the task *with* Jesus *and* after he is gone. Even from the very beginning Jesus calls others to share and to learn and be ready to receive his life

ready to carry it forward into all the areas of human life and existence.

- As we think about the Galileans — religious nobodies!
We learn Not to write ourselves off.
- The time is fulfilled
We learn that every day is the time of Christ's coming.
- The kingdom of God has come near.
We see the presence of the kingdom in Jesus and it is present among us today.
- Repent and believe the good news.

As we ponder the anniversaries and other anniversaries, let us use them to recall, relive, reflect AND repent.

Be ready to make changes which matter.