

25th December 2005 Christmas

Rob Lamerton

Readings for Christmas Eve:

- Isaiah 9:2-7
- Psalm 96, page 323
- Titus 2:11-14
- Luke 2:1-14

text is available at <http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/lectionary/BAvent/bAdvent4.htm>

Sunday 25th December 2005 - Christmas

There is a shortage of Holly in Ireland this year! (and that is the only true part of this story...)

But still one family was able to decorate their fireplace with Holly — it looked a picture; lovely rich green spiky leaves and beautiful red berries! Eventually Santa arrived and slipped down the chimney — When he got to the bottom he was **HOLLIFIED!**

And so we come to celebrate Christmas and in the midst of all the parties and socializing, the present buying and preparing for visitors and or holidays, we draw aside to worship God and to ponder the meaning of Christmas — the celebration of Christ and particularly the beginning of the Christ event: the birth of Jesus all those years ago in Bethlehem.

[Sermon]

Workers have agreed to have Christmas included among the days when they would receive special award payments for working — putting a value on the day.

Around the same time some were arguing for the term

Christian to be dropped and instead refer to the Holiday Season [or greeting] Happy Holidays.

Evidently this is big in New York where the large Jewish population celebrates Hannukah (the festival of Dedication which observes the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple in 168BC.)

At least the reference to Holidays acknowledges the Holy Days of the various faiths. But for me I don't see a problem with wishing people a Happy Christmas because most people acknowledge it in a cultural way at many levels.

At the end of the year I wished Danny Cohen — Happy Hannukah as he wished me Happy Christmas.

I also wished some people Happy Christmas and then realized they are Hindu! They graciously acknowledged that they observe their form of Christmas because living in Australia there is no escaping it!

I think we should celebrate Christmas in a joyful and positive way in the midst of our multicultural society. But our celebration should not be an expression of superiority — rather they should show respect — and call us to the sort of service and humility as christians.

We celebrate the birth of Christ who would be ashamed of us his disciples if we did anything less than show respect for all people!

Year by year, we sing fairly triumphal traditional hymns — I have chosen one which is not so triumphal but nevertheless celebratory. "When God Almighty came to be one of us." I like the way modern carols dismantle some of the triumphalism eg John Bell's "Once in Judah's least known city":

"Once in Judah's least known city,
Stood a boarding house with back-door shed,
Where an almost single-parent mother
Tried to find her new-born son a bed.
Mary's mum and dad went wild
When they heard their daughter had a child.

3 Can he be our youth and childhood's pattern
When we know not how he daily grew?
Was he always little, weak and helpless,
Did he share our joys and problems too?
In our laughter, fun and madness,
Does the Lord of love suspect our gladness?

What we have achieved at St Philip's

We have celebrated faithfully Sunday by Sunday and I believe examined the Scriptures.

We have maintained an open and accepting community of faith.

The Twilight Fair — created a wonderful community event.

Mission: Water Project in Burma; Nungalinya Aboriginal College in Darwin; supported the ministry at Mogo.

Care:
Northbourne Community Care
Pandoras

Music in cooperation with CAMRA:
Ordo Virtutum — Hildegard of Bingen
The Messiah
Carols

Practical:
Awaiting the replacement of the Parish Hall Roof thanks to the ACT Government funding (grant) and Fundraising.... Twilight Fair

And so we come to this Christmas Celebration and we read again the familiar stories and sing the familiar or not so familiar carols, to recall the birth of the Son of God in Bethlehem.

We don't know exactly when he was born, but the stories we have tells us how his early followers and disciples understood his greatness.

Isaiah spoke many years before Jesus of the hope of a liberator — one who would free his people from the enemy; from war and oppression — his vision was that this great agent of God would come and establish Justice and Peace almost like an outsider coming to solve problems.

Then Luke in his gospel describes an astoundingly humble scene when he describes the birth of Jesus — it's a humble scene — but with touches of great glory and wonder! I think the two strands indicate Luke's experiences of Jesus who went against many of the accepted standards of his day to open up the truth of God. Luke's emphasis on Jesus' ministry of healing, of his acceptance of women, and the work of God's Spirit in ordinary human situations remind us that he saw human earthiness and the wonderful glory of God intertwined; that God was not an outsider coming to solve our problems for us but working among and within — a spirit evident in Paul's letter to Titus "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all" training us to renounce impiety — a life without God; and worldly passion — greed, selfishness, anger, violence etc.

The challenge is to participate with God in the work of Justice and Peace;
to participate in the debates about:

Industrial Relations
Anti-terror legislation
Welfare legislation etc...

Christmas is about the birth of a child and about the potential of that Child.

I think it also reminds us of the potential God gives to all of us.

The potential to be Christ like — to combine the wonderful Spirit of God with our own earthy humanity and live our lives to the full while giving others the freedom and encouragement to do so in the love of Christ.