

Joy of Heaven to Earth Come Down

Christmas Day 2022

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor ACT Australia

The Reverend Canon Professor Scott Cowdell

Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-4; John 1:1-14

+In the Name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

The joy of Christmas means more than just a family celebration, a break from work, a chance to relax the diet, or a few luxurious days in front of the Boxing Day Test Match. It's all of these things, of course, but it points to something deeper. The Eucharist we celebrate and the Scripture readings we hear today point to the joy of God in our celebration—a joy that God is bursting to share with human beings.

Christmas joy is as old as creation, as our Hebrews reading tells us this morning. God creates and loves the world. Jesus Christ is the key to that creation, and the face of that love, to be found at the heart of what our world means. Jesus Christ is testified to here in this Hebrews passage as the exact imprint of God's being, and as the word that God has been insinuating into humanoid imaginations from prehistoric times—a word that has eventually taken visible shape and concrete form in the life of Jesus Christ. Our Hebrews reading pictures Jesus Christ as the pinnacle of creation, above the angels, and as the underlying theme of human history, sensed by the prophets of every age. Christmas celebrates the making flesh of this constant word, this constant love, this constant purpose, this constant presence of God.

The joy of our Psalm this morning, with its trumpets and horns, is entirely fitting. Isaiah's invitation in our first reading—that the holy city should break into song—is what we're doing this morning with our carols. Our God remains a going concern; our God is the missing piece that suddenly turns up in life to help us see life's puzzle whole and entire, perhaps for the first time, and to begin working things out in our lives—again, perhaps for the first time.

This is the promise of our gospel reading this morning, from the prologue of John, about the word becoming flesh. *Flesh* of course means human, it means real, it means vulnerable, it means here and now. And as for *word*: the Word of God stands at the centre of reality, and at the heart of life's meaning. So, instead of a philosophical principle or a vaporous spiritual something or other, the Word of God becomes a human life, and a historical project, and, among us today, the word of God becomes a sacramental presence given into our palms or placed on our tongue, as well as a spiritual gift for our imaginations.

This invitation is also a challenge. It was a challenge for Jesus himself when he came to his own people, but they refused to know him, as we hear in our Gospel today. We human beings in general, and even many Christians, prefer a different word. Many won't really welcome the silent, gentle approach of the Word made flesh. Many are looking for a more strident word, a more certain word, a more controlling word, often a more violent word. There are many grim ideologies and utopian delusions that have galvanised human beings in the past, and still today, regardless of their cost. We'll build our view of the world on anything from America's social media fuelled extremes of authoritarian populism, to Russia's pathetically grandiose empire building in Ukraine, or else we'll cling to fever dreams of unending economic growth while we refuse to take climate change seriously. Many of us humans would prefer any word as long as it isn't the word made flesh, and any option rather

than taking life on God's terms. All of us reject God's invitation some of the time, while some reject it all of the time.

But, friends, God's joy and patience are unstoppable. And so, God's invitation comes back to us Christmas by Christmas, Easter by Easter and, of course, Sunday by Sunday as well. Whatever you may think life's about, here today it's about a robust joy that goes to the heart of our cosmos, to the root meaning of human history, and to the rusty levers that work the innermost dynamics of our own lives, to free them up and get them moving again.

The Lord be with you ...