

To know him, that we may make him known.

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Naming and Circumcision of Jesus, Year A — 1 January 2023

Reverend Martin Johnson

Numbers 6.22-27; Psalm 8; Galatians; Luke 2.15-21

Like many of you I've had a go at a few different jobs in my time. I've worked for a greengrocer and baker, I've picked hops and painted houses, collected taxes, delivered mail and delivered sermons. But I've never been in sales! I think that I would probably be more likely to convince you not to buy the product that I was spruiking! The trouble is that we have not been good at sales in the Church, in fact most of the time we have convinced folk not to purchase our product!

There are of course many reasons for this, too many to consider this morning. But one thing we need to think about is, what is our product and how well do we know it? I know this language doesn't really fit, we are not into sales but we are called to make Jesus present and to proclaim this idea! The question remains: how well do we know our product?

Today's festival in the octave of Christmas reinforces the idea at the very heart of heart our our faith . . . the incarnation: Jesus, the Son of God, born of a woman, born under the law. Jesus, completely at one with the human condition; 'truly human' as we say in the Nicene Creed, that we might be to him brothers and sisters, children of God. The Spirit confirms this intimacy that we share, through Christ God is completely at one with us, so much so that he is 'Abba' to us. That lovely familial, intimate name by which a Jewish son or daughter would address their male parent.

New Year is one of those times of reassessment, I won't say resolution, because they rarely seem to make it past the first week! For us here at St Philip's it is a chance to set some direction. To consider what it means to be at one with Jesus, to ponder what it means for us to call God, Abba.

In today's Gospel we read of the amazement of all those who heard the story of the shepherds. Clearly a crowd had gathered, perhaps they were patrons of the inn. But then we get the 'But' - verse 19: 'But, Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.' Luke clearly wants to differentiate Mary's response from those of the gathered crowd. Her response is far more measured, almost pragmatic; this is her way it seems, and it's not the first time. When the angel Gabriel comes to her to announce that she is bear the Christ child, Mary, we read 'is much perplexed and pondered what sort of greeting this might be' and in a slightly different vain we hear Mary say to the angel 'how can this be, since I am a virgin.' Later on in this second chapter of Luke we hear of Jesus the 12 year old, who goes missing on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He is found eventually and there is understandably just a hint of tension in the family: 'your Father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' And later on when things have calmed down we are told that Mary 'treasured all these things in her heart.'

What I want to suggest is that in these accounts regarding the birth of Jesus we find a family, yes, much like many others; it's a family that we might recognise. But I want us to take a step further to follow Mary and ponder, treasure this in our hearts and see what this means for us to be a part of this family. Unlike our biological families this is not an accident of birth but something more, we need to contemplate this.

We began last year with our day of reflection our day of pondering and I would like us to continue this pondering in this New Year. Between February and September in six sessions we will engage in a program of prayer, theology, and spirituality, leading to a greater understanding of our mission. I don't think that it's drawing too long a bow to say that this what we can see in the life of Mary from the manger to the cross and beyond. It is all about Jesus, of course, but drawing upon all the resources from our tradition. We need to know him, before we can make him known. I'm not going to say too much about the program other than to say that the first session is called 'Cultivating a Contemplative Posture.' Learning what it is to ponder and treasure, reflect and be still, this is where mission begins, not with a ten point plan!

I get a sense that Mary was a great listener, but was unafraid to question . . . 'how can this be?' While everyone else was amazed, Mary listened and pondered, no doubt she would be thinking what might this mean? This is where we might begin; our posture. Quoting John Main, the founder of the World Community for Christian Meditation: 'In Mary they—that is the early Christian communities—saw the reflection, indeed the ideal, of their own experience . . . because they knew that every Christian, every responsive heart, is called to bring Jesus to birth within him or her.' For our offertory we will sing that lovely rather contemplative carol 'O little town of Bethlehem.' In the third verse we hear: 'So God imparts to human hearts, the blessings of his heaven. No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.'

I'm looking forward to this year as we consider again what it means with Jesus to call God *Abba* and being present to God in Christ, we might then be present to one another and our community in mission. Amen.