

Christmas Eve
Year A - December 24th, 2016 - 11.00pm

Isaiah 9:2-7
Psalm 96
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-20

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

I wonder whether you can recall a time in your life in which something has happened that made you think - “nothing is ever going to be the same again”? Throughout human history there have been such occurrences described. For some, it was the first step of humans on the moon. It was as though this was such an unlikely dream, that when it happened people thought literally “the sky’s the limit - nothing will ever be the same.”

For others, perhaps it was the terrible events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when the atomic bomb was first used. In this action, such a line was crossed that it was impossible to think that things would ever be the same again.

For many in their own personal lives, it is the act falling in love with the person who is to be their life partner, or it is felt with the birth of the first (or indeed subsequent) child - how such apparently simple acts can literally mean that nothing is ever the same again...

For the British poet, Ursula Fanthorpe, who in her life time wrote some wonderful poems, particularly Christmas poetry, she certainly described this sense in her poem simply entitled BC:AD.

*This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.*

*This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.*

*This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.*

*And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect
Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven.*

The event which we gather to remember and celebrate this night is indeed the event after which everything changed. As Fanthorpe describes, it was the moment when *before* turned into *after* - when time stopped. And when it started again, everything had changed. God, the Creator of all that is and was and will be was in that created world, coming not amidst great acclamation and celebration, but rather in humility and poverty; born to simple Jewish Peasants. And yet, nothing would ever be the same again.

The Prophet Isaiah wrote, as we heard earlier - “For a child has been born for us, a son given to us... and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Is.9:2) This child who was born of Mary changes everything. This child, born in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes changes how we live. This child, born to the sound of angels singing Gloria in Excelcis Deo – this child to whom the wise ones came from afar bearing gifts – this child, changed the way the entire world works.

And this Jesus, born into a world torn by strife and hatred and division and pain and poverty, this child is born anew wherever men and women say, “I’ll follow Him. I’ll follow Him as my Savior. I’ll follow Him as my Lord.”

For people of faith, we keep this festival as a reminder of Christ (quite literally) being born into our lives. There is nothing sentimental or romantic about this, nor is it just a matter of dogma. Christians can literally list in terms of observable change, how everything in our lives has been affected because of the coming of Christ into our personal world of feelings, thoughts and behaviour.

When this child, Jesus grew up, He said His reason for coming, again quoting Isaiah, from the 61st chapter, was this:

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Is.61:1-2a)

This child, when He grew up, came to show us the way to live changed lives - lives full of love, lives of compassion, lives of goodness, lives of kindness, lives of justice. This child came to show us how to change the world. I am sure that I don’t need to list to you the litany of disaster and terror that has beset our world in the past year - it could not be clearer - the inspiration that God gives through Christ’s birth is so desperately needed.

Are we ready for this new vision that Christ heralds, a new inspiration, so that it may be true of us... that from this day, nothing will ever be the same again? If so, this Christmas, make room for him to change us. This Christmas help us change the world. And make a new commitment, to go out from this day, to let this Christmas Day, be the first day of a new world, where truly nothing is ever the same again.

As we recall the birth of Jesus over 2000 years ago, may you and your family experience this Christmas the wonder and miracle, as well as the love and joy, of God’s great gift to us all. May you know something of the Christ-child within you, and may you allow him to be born in you. May the Lord be with you on this most Holy Night. And may your life never be the same again...

Amen