



Living the Story

Rev Cate Thorn

Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-20

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Christmas - the festival of the Nativity, the birth of Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. We pull together stories from two quite different gospels to make this Christmas story.

It's one we love and want to continue to tell and yet. During Advent we talked about family traditions no longer kept through lack of interest or active resistance. It can be like this with the religious story of Christmas. How do we tell it to the generations following us? We know the story well. Is the world of our children and grandchildren so different that translating it is too daunting a task or maybe they don't have enough time or interest?

Does the nativity story no longer resonate with our young ones? It's wonder and mystery doesn't seem so incredible in the digital world where imagined impossibilities are an everyday thing they can interact.

Does this render the nativity story redundant or meaningless?

Let's take a look at this nativity scene. It shows a family with a mother, father, baby and witnesses to the occasion. What struck me this year was what this nativity scene communicates about the construct of whanau, and this a whanau tapu, a holy family. Does it set up some sort of ideal that isn't the lived experience of many?

Then if we poke around here a moment we learn from the story that the mother, a pregnant Mary, has had a baby who's to be called Jesus. Joseph is not the biological father, angels and shepherds and wise people (who actually don't arrive for a bit so are pre-emptively present), impelled by

angels or a leading star, arrive unexpectedly to affirm this birth. They have a role in this drama.

How many of these different characters can you identify with? How many of you are or have been shepherds? Consider yourself an angel? Is a person who walks the way of wisdom? Who has awihed a child not biologically your own? Who's been pregnant and given birth? Some of us may be or have been some of these things at some time. But the only character in this scene we can **all** identify with is the newborn, a baby born of a woman. We each have experienced this, even if we don't remember it.

As we listen to the story, we learn about this child through those other characters, angels, shepherds and wise people as they tell and name their part. So it is in our lives, the people surrounding us name, acknowledge, and give of who they are to nurture, share and bring us to life.

In wanting to tell the nativity story, what do we want to communicate? Do we simply want to reminisce? Young people have an acute radar to discern integrity. Is this Christmas nativity story in our hearts and minds just a children's story? Or does this story change us? Influence how we interact, approach life, decide what's important or think is possible?

What does this story reveal and what difference does it make?

This story reveals the potential for the divine to come to life within us, to be translated and known through us. Holiness is nestled in our hands always, all days. Not holiness set apart, but holiness within life. This makes it possible, through us, for "the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, to be broken." Let me share a story from life.

Just a short few years ago, not far from here, a dream, an impossible vision was imagined. Along with courage, determination and insistence that this hoped for dream could be made real. Not to benefit those who had the dream, so they could boast, but to make real a place where the lost and the least could find home. A dream of contagious passion, it caught the imagination and willingness of those who could make it

happen. The people of this place Ngati Whatua o Orakei, local and national government, healthcare, developers, businesses, architects, project managers, builders, fundraisers and fund givers came together.

That impossible vision is made real. The collective will, expertise, hands and hearts and giving of so many have brought this dream, a place of aroha and manaakitanga into being. We were privileged to walk through this impossible dream last Monday, its name is HomeGround.

Words of karakia and blessing awoke the spirit there, walking through each space, we were asked to touch each wall, in doing so become part of bringing and breathing HomeGround to life.

During the korero, the speeches afterward, it was said “this is the end of a beginning.” What will make this baby have life? The real people who will enliven HomeGround and make real the absolutely insistent declaration that no one will be excluded, no one will be left behind, no one will be told they do not matter or are not worthy for this ground is their home.

That HomeGround should come into being is an astounding feat in itself. As we mingled and talked with project managers, architects, mission staff, construction workers, business owners, sponsors, politicians, fundraisers or financiers this project, for them, had been like none other. Of course, there had been constant negotiations. Straight forward isn't the nature of construction, especially with lockdowns. Even so there was a sense of 'worthiness' in this project that stood it out from others. Some workers reflected that, but for the chance given them by Built Environs, they could well have been a Mission client, homeless and in need.

I was struck by the gentle generosity, by people really wanting to be there, proud to have been part of this. As if there was something more organic going on here. They'd become part of creating something that said we **can** care, we **can** create places that include, we **can** be part of making our society a place we are proud to live and participate in. And each of them, doing what they do best, was what was needed and wanted and made it happen. The impossible made real, there are very real strains of the nativity story here.

This Christmas do we want to **talk about** the story or to think of ways to **live out** the story? We've each been a new-born child. This is the character we inhabit in the nativity of Christmas, born to participate and to be holy on the sacred ground of earth, bringing, giving who we **are** for the life of the world.