



**Christmas is Now**

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Christmas Day

Isaiah 9: 2-7; Luke 2:8-20

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Christmas, here we are again. A time for family, for food, for gift giving. A season there's expectation of abundance and for us to be generous. When more than the usual's expected, and we stretch and stress ourselves to achieve this. I'm not sure there's another time in the year with such a universal condition.

Christmas also has about it a sense of nostalgia, of times gone by remembered fondly. Stories of long ago, of family and/or church traditions. There may be new innovations yet like as not they're a move away from a place of before.

In Advent, the four weeks that lead to Christmas, tradition sees this as a time we remember **back** to the story of Jesus' birth in historic time and look **forward** to Christ's coming again. Reminding us we live in in between times, to "keep awake" in case we miss the return. Busy looking back, and looking forward, what does living now look like? Oh, that's right, waiting and looking for something that's not yet. Not exactly an encouragement to pay attention to how we live now.

Perhaps it's no surprise, then, that at Christmas that we think back, because we know what that was. The story that gives us Christmas claims location in historic time, we have a datum point. The yet to come? Who knows? And the storyline of the second coming – it's been such a long time, there's some serious some credibility issues. Not only for those who still tell the story but for the increasing number who know nothing of it.

What if Christmas was a now thing? If within each moment, each now, all the parts of the Christmas story are taking place. Let's look at the nativity story, the characters in particular. Mary and Joseph have journeyed to Bethlehem, in a stable their first child is just born. Shepherds, in dark coldness, going about their usual, are startled by bright light of angels directing them to witness to this birth. The Magi, soon to come from afar, wise ones following celestial signs that reveal the significance of this child born, bring gifts to honour this birth.

If we look a bit closer, it's rather a rag tag band gathered here. Mary likely around 12 or 14, although engaged to Joseph had become pregnant out of wedlock; which ostensibly makes Joseph a cuckolded husband; shepherds at this time in history were so lowly regarded they weren't considered trustworthy enough to give evidence in court; and the Magi were religious and racial foreigners. When you look closely, gathered around this infant, is an unlikely mixture of misfit individuals. I'm not sure you could pick a **more** unlikely story to proclaim God than this, one with less credibility if you tried. And yet it's the one we tell.

God in Jesus chooses to be born among such as these: the outcast, the poor, the displaced, the disregarded, overlooked, the outsider, those disenfranchised by systems of power. We interpret this to reveal that God's priority is to such as these. And rightly so. We proclaim this reveals a radically inclusive God. Yet where, in this story, are those of us not like this. Are we excluded from being those who bring God to life in the world?

In the various collected stories that make up the drama of Jesus' birth, each person: Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, Magi, Herod, upon encounter with God through angelic or celestial sign is afraid. Each has a choice and chooses what they do in response. Their response reveals them. I wonder, are they afraid because they encounter God, or because of what this encounter reveals to them of themselves that comes to be expressed in what they do? From bringing God to life, to testifying to God alive, to taking the life of every child out of fear, just in case.

The good, the bad and the ugly of human nature are included in this story. They help form the woven together story we tell. Which isn't

to suggest all human behaviour's divinely condoned, rather it proposes humans can know God, the choice of their response rests with them.

God, known in Jesus, was born as we are. And at birth forfeited just about every human or social claim to prestige or influence. Born to parents and witnessed to by an assortment of ordinary people made remarkable by their receptivity to God and willingness for God to be believable. In this new life something astonishing is declared – God's presence with us in our world, requires our response, needs our nurture to grow and come to fullness of life. Doesn't ask of us something we don't know but asks us to respond in ways that come most naturally to us, doesn't ask us to be more or other than human but encourages us to be fully human.

The agents of God in this story were afraid before angelic appearance and cosmic declaration. Their fear led them to act, to step into the impossible, to trust that through them God would be made known. There's much to fear in our times, it causes us to cower away, to defend ourselves. Could our fear be God nudging us to have courage to face our world as it is and to see the potential in us to respond. To participate in creating solutions, if you like. To choose to step toward, to act **for** what appears impossible, hopeless, helpless, hapless, too hard, too broken. The things we fear in ourselves, in the events and in others around us make us aware of our vulnerability, open us to God's nudging and needing of us - however we might name that. Christmas now, maybe it's about allowing the vulnerability of our fear to open us. In that fraction of time to know each of us and our world **is** the dwelling place of God, by our choices and actions reveal or conceal this.