



**Rev Diana Rattray**

**Christ in our midst**

Isaiah 52: 7-10;

John 1: 1-14

Year B Christmas Day

25 December 2023

This Christmas morning, as the sun rises in the sky, we are remembering and giving thanks for the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Much of the imagery of Jesus birth and traditional celebrations of it, does not fit with our kiwi Christmas. The cold snowy stable, the long dark nights, the carol singing and then a warm mulled wine around the fire place. No we in Aotearoa New Zealand are waking around about the longest day. We have come to the end of another work, school and academic year. Many of us are preparing to go camping or away on holiday or at least get a few days off our usual routines.

Yet however we experience and frame the birth narrative, the story of God made flesh coming to dwell among us the message remains the same. God came in the fragile form of a new born baby, small and vulnerable. Often we focus a lot on the sweet image of a baby in a manger. A cute sight but someone who does not ask that much of us. A purely sentimental image of Jesus is not enough in our Christmas celebrations. Sentimentality can mean that we avoid having an actual relationship.

As John says in the logos, our gospel this morning. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. The logos, the word of God confronts us, converts us and consoles us in that order. We are all too aware of the darkness in our world and even in our own lives.

The images we are seeing and have seen of destruction in Gaza, are harrowing, especially when children are impacted. The plight of Israeli hostages and the raw grief of their family members. So many places in our world being impacted by climate related extreme weather events as our world continues to get warmer. Along side there is still Covid and other illness and natural disasters which directly affect us and those we love. There is suffering because of injustice. The increasing gap between the rich and the poor.

So today as we focus on Jesus let us not limit Jesus in infantile form. All through Advent we have said Come O come Emmanuel, God with us, Christ, God incarnate, God born as a human. Christ birth signalled a new birth of history and creation. Today we reflect on our response to that birth . We are invited to be a part of and live in God's big picture. In Christ's birth we have been offered a share in the One Life, the eternal life, God's life that became visible in this world in Jesus.

In the very familiar Christmas story as told in the gospel of Luke we are told three times that the child was born and laid in a manger. Not on a pile of blankets or cloths in the corner but in a manger, the feeding place. This baby resting

in a manger on the night of his birth will be the “Bread of life.”

Each time we gather around the altar we remember the mystery, that though it is beyond human comprehension God took on human form lived among us suffered, died and was raised that we might know true life in this world and the next.

Jesus did not come into the world to solve all problems in our world and in our lives like a fairy godmother.

What Jesus did and does is provide a way for all of us to continue to work to establish justice, to work towards bringing the world closer to how God intends it to be.

It is up to us how we choose to respond. It may mean stepping out of our comfort zone. To be open and thus more vulnerable. To be open to the amazing but transformative love of God.

Through Advent, a time of preparation, we have been asking God to come. Now at Christmas we celebrate Jesus coming in our midst. Jesus who was, who is and is to come.

It is up to us how we respond to the coming of Jesus, the Lord of all. The one whose birth we celebrate today calls each one of us, however young or old to live lives practising peacemaking and being involved in social outreach and justice.

As we move now to a time of communion as we feed on the bread of heaven let us be open again to God's spirit, te Wairua Tapu, which is all around.

I conclude with words of wisdom from Celtic Author John O'Donohue.

“At Christmas, time deepens. The Celtic imagination knew that time is eternity in disguise. They embraced the day as a sacred space. Christmas reminds us to glory in the simplicity and wonder of one day; it unveils the extraordinary that our hurried lives conceal and neglect. We have been given such immense possibilities. We desperately need to make clearances in our entangled lives to let our souls breathe. We must take care of ourselves and especially of our suffering brothers and sisters.[1]”  
May you all have a blessed and joy filled Christmas. Amen.

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[1] ©JOHN O'DONOHUE

Excerpt from the unpublished collection of John O'Donohue: <https://johnodonohue.com/>