

Readings: Luke 2: 1-7, 8 – 14, 15 - 20

Reflection: A BABY, SHEPHERDS AND ANGELS ?

- *familiar story but powerful message*
- *Emmanuel God is with us always
through all our joys and challenges*
- *an invitation to wonder and think deeply*
- *what does this story mean to you in 2019?*

Isaiah proclaimed that God would be with us – Emmanuel. The angels sang Glory to God - and Jesus was born in a shed. Well that is what the stable was – just a shed where animals were sheltered and fed. Nativity scenes often glamourise and sanitize the stable – it looks clean and well organised, but the reality was probably very different.

Yet have you ever thought about what amazing things happen in sheds? Some of you may have a connection with the MenzShed movement. Some Menz sheds are very simple but some very ornate, full of expensive equipment. I visited one provided by a church in Christchurch for the men in the local community – it was purpose built and contained all kinds of tools, including wood lathes and engineering marvels. Amazing things happen in such sheds and through them – not just in the things that are made there, but also because they have the power to change the lives of the lonely and reclusive, by providing a space to work on a project with congenial company.

Did you know that Crick and Watson discovered DNA in a bike shed ?– that was the space they had to work in. After that discovery they were offered pristine laboratories but their initial work was done in a shed. The stuff of which life is made was discovered in a shed – and the maker of life was born in one.

Jesus, the living reality of God being with us, was born in a shed in Bethlehem. Jesus' life showed us God immersed in humanity. Jesus showed us how to live God's way. We are embraced by the mystery of God – revealed in and through this Incarnation.

In John chapter one, the one who is “light” and “life” is now here in our midst – or as the words of the last verse of *O come all ye faithful*, sung on Christmas morning, explain “Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing”. That thought of ‘God with us’ is one of the messages I hope you will remember this Christmas Eve. This is no aloof, distant, dispassionate, detached God. Jesus experienced life as we do. The Word has come among us bringing light, hope, peace, joy and love – and is always with us, through the good times and the difficult ones, the joys and the challenges.

This is the God of all humanity, who chooses above all to identify with those most downtrodden, forgotten, homeless, impoverished, misunderstood, rejected, labelled and scorned. This is the God who loved the whole world so much that he sent his son that all the world might know abundant life. The shepherds are examples of people on the fringes of society. Luke's gospel begins with the image of the lowliest in society being important to God – so important that they are the first to hear that Jesus is born and they are invited to go and see him for themselves. This is a powerful introduction to the gospel that shows us very clearly that God cares for those who are abandoned by others. Jesus would later show through his ministry that he connected with the weak and lowly and stood with them; he confronted injustice; and he gave people a sense of belonging by drawing them into God's family. You belong in God's family – that is part of the Christmas message too. God cares about you and loves you .

The Christmas story is a story of love. It is also a story filled with wonder. It entrances and draws us into the mystery of God. Through the stories of Mary and Joseph, a baby, shepherds, angels, and wise men, we encounter God's unconditional love and the God who is within us. The Word became a human being, immersed in life with us. God's promise is to be with us always – within us, if we are willing for that to happen.

Joy Cowley has a poem entitled *God Within* (Come and See p. 8) that offers us a particular way of looking at this.

God within you – if you make room for God in your life.

But there is something else you might like to remember this Christmas Eve. We are all important to God. We all matter. Whether you have a family around you and look forward to spending time with them at this time of the year, or whether you are alone, you matter to God.

What's more, we all have a part to play in God's realm – in God's mission. We all have gifts and skills, God-given gifts and skills, to use to help others to see the light of God shining in their darkness. We are called not to escape this world, but to immerse ourselves – in the name of God – into the world around us.

Where will that world be for you this week, and into the new year? Maybe it will be amongst your family or friends at a time when you can celebrate or relax together. Maybe it will be amongst work colleagues or in situations in your community. You have a special role that only you can fill. Be the person God can help you to be. God is with you always – to offer strength and comfort, deep peace and joy. Bring glory to God and joy to the world in all that you do. God bless you, and Happy Christmas. Amen.

Matawhero: As our response to God we sing part of a New Zealand Christmas song - as a prayer that Christmas will be real for everyone this year. *Star child*

St Andrew's: as our response to God we are first challenged by the words of *Dream a Dream*
+ prayer ... and then sing *Star child*