

Praying for peace

4 December 2022 – Advent 2

BIBLE READINGS

[Isaiah 2:1-5](#)

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

In the last days,
the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.
Many peoples will come and say,
'Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.'
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war any more.
O house of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the Lord.

[John 1:1-14 \(The Message\)](#)

The Word was first,
the Word present to God,
God present to the Word.
The Word was God,
in readiness for God from day one.
Everything was created through him;
nothing — not one thing! —

came into being without him.

What came into existence was Life,
and the Life was Light to live by.

The Life–Light blazed out of the darkness;
the darkness couldn't put it out.

There once was a man, his name John, sent by God to point out the way to the Life–Light. He came to show everyone where to look, who to believe in. John was not himself the Light; he was there to show the way to the Light.

The Life–Light was the real thing:
every person entering Life
he brings into Light.

He was in the world,
the world was there through him,
and yet the world didn't even notice.

He came to his own people,
but they didn't want him.

But whoever did want him,
who believed he was who he claimed
and would do what he said,
he made to be their true selves,
their child–of–God selves.

These are the God–begotten,
not blood–begotten,
not flesh–begotten,
not sex–begotten.

The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.

We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one–of–a–kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
generous inside and out,
true from start to finish.

MESSAGE

Where is the best place to start a story? We usually begin by laying out some **context** ... it was during the dark days of Covid lockdown when we couldn't leave our homes except for a small number of reasons ... it was during the hot days of summer – can you remember what it was like to actually feel hot – a bit like today? ...



Then something **happens** or there's an **encounter** between two people ... it was at a dance and when I looked across the room I saw the most beautiful smile ... or perhaps I was feeling stressed out and tired as I waited in the supermarket checkout queue when this delightful young person came up to me and said ...



The **Gospels** are **stories about Jesus** that tell us who he was, what he taught and how he made such an impact on the people around him, and then at the height of his popularity how he was betrayed by his enemies and arrested and killed. These stories tell us of the hope and excitement and bewilderment of the crowds – and the real buzz – that surrounded Jesus

wherever he went.

But each of these Gospel stories has a different starting point.

For **Mark**, probably the first Gospel to be written down, the story starts with John the Baptist who appears like a mirage in the desert, baptising people in the muddy River Jordan and telling them to change their ways and turn back to God. All of a sudden, the adult Jesus shows up and is baptised by John and a voice comes from heaven 'You are my Son'.



The hearers of Mark's story about Jesus were no doubt impressed by its fast pace and breathless excitement but wanted to know more about Jesus' **origins** ... where did Jesus come from? who were his parents? how did he come to be at the River

Jordan on that fateful day? And so when Matthew and Luke wrote their Gospels – their stories about Jesus – each of them included a **backstory** for Jesus.

They each explained that Jesus was born in **Bethlehem**, a small town near Jerusalem, that his parents were named **Joseph** and **Mary** and how Joseph was descended from the **line of David**, the **royal family** of Israel. And they each explain, in their own way, that the birth of Jesus was no ordinary birth. Well, maybe it was an ordinary, messy birth, but how Jesus was **conceived** was highly unusual. Let me briefly tell you **that story ...**



According to **Luke**, Mary was just quietly minding her own business in another town up north called Nazareth when out of the blue an angel appeared to her and told her the most amazing news ... that we'll be hearing about next week.

And according to **Matthew**, when Joseph hears Mary's amazing news he is not amused ... not amused at all ... and how he plans to divorce Mary and send her away ... but then an angel visits him in a dream ... we'll be hearing more of this story in two weeks' time.



Then finally there is the Gospel of **John**, written down much later than the other three Gospels and telling the story of Jesus in quite a different way. John begins his story **much, much earlier** than Luke and Matthew, right back at the dawn of time. The opening words of the whole Bible in the book of **Genesis** go like this ...

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was formless and dark, God said 'Let there be light' and there was light ...

The start of John's Gospel echoes this story of creation ...

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into existence through him ... what came into being was life and the life was the light of all people ... and the Word became flesh and blood and lived among us ...

So, says John, if you want to really understand the story about Jesus you have to go back to the **very start**, the **beginning of everything**, because Jesus was there with God at the beginning, creating the world and bringing life and light. So while Luke and Matthew insist that Jesus was no ordinary baby, John wants to claim more ... insisting that Jesus was **no ordinary human being**. He was one with God and came from God as God's Word. And just as God spoke creation into existence in Genesis, so God speaks through Jesus to bring a new creation into being – children of God – people born of God – a little like Jesus himself.

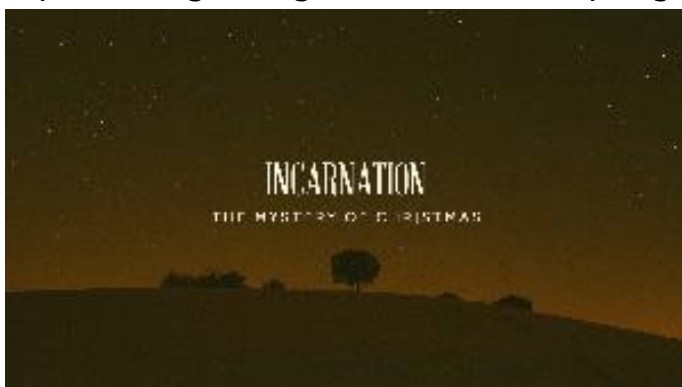
So I wonder what John thought about Jesus being born as a human baby? He just kind of assumes that's the case, but never states it as baldly as that. In John's story, Jesus certainly has a **mother** who appears from time to time but she is not named as Mary.

Jesus also has a **father** in John's story but it's not Joseph his earthly father, who is never mentioned at all.

Rather, John insists, Jesus' father is none other than **God**.



The great hope expressed through John's story of Jesus is that we can all get to know God and have a close and intimate relationship with God in a new way through Jesus. God has a **plan** to bring **life** to the world – a plan that goes right back to the very beginning of everything, back to creation itself.



And God has brought this plan to us **personally** – in human form – in the life and message and death of Jesus. This is the **mystery** of what we call the **incarnation** ... how God was present in and through the life of Jesus.

It is through Jesus that true **light** came

into the world – and why Jesus can call himself the **light of the world**. It's one reason why we light candles at Advent – to remember how Jesus brought God's **light** and **life** to us – bringing us hope, peace, joy and love.

John calls this life that is possible because of Jesus '**eternal life**' – and it's why we have **evergreen trees** as Christmas trees – as symbols of eternal life – life that doesn't die – and why we spread green branches around the Advent candles.

There is much more to tell in John's story of Jesus but that's all we have time for today. Just a heads up, though, for **next year** when we will be working our way through the **whole of John's Gospel** leading up to Easter.

But now, it's time to change track a little and consider our second Bible reading from **Isaiah**, which ties in with lighting the Advent candle of **peace**.

In the reading, people and nations will come to Jerusalem to learn of God's ways. Through these people, God's word and God's justice will then go from Jerusalem and out into the world.

And something truly astounding will happen in those 'last days' – the days when God's kingdom will finally dawn – nations will stop fighting each other; they will turn their weapons made for killing into farm implements that can be used to bring life by growing crops of food.



The reading finishes with the call to let us all walk in the **light** of the Lord.

Let us all walk in God's way of **peace**.

O God, may it be so.

And may those days of peace come **soon**.

May you change the hearts and minds of dictators like Putin to see the futility and brutality of war and to learn that there is a better way.

Bring your peace.

May you change the hearts and minds of Australian people as we aim to undo some of the wrongs of the past against indigenous Australians.

Bring your peace.

[illegible]

Let us hold a minute or two of silence as we pray for peace in our world and then as Kathryn sings about peace, let us continue in an attitude of prayer ...

Christ be our light

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

light for the world to see.

Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Make us your living voice.

Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,

shared until all are fed.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

Refrain

Many the gifts, many the people,

many the hearts that yearn to belong.

Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Refrain

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Christ is our peace

Christ is our peace,
Christ is our health,
he the true Word,
his the true wealth –
gifts to be shared by the simple and poor:
peace in your land,
peace at your door.

Peace in your mouth,
peace in the hands,
open to truth,
to love's demands:
those who would go with Christ also must bleed –
bright is the flower,
burst is the seed.

Who work for peace
find the true wealth;
who heal the hurt
find their own health –
peace will flow on through the hearts that believe:
this may we know,
thus may we live.

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