

Living out the Christmas story

Christmas Day 2024

INTRODUCING TODAY'S READINGS

Today is Christmas Day 25th December.

But there are **two, separate events** happening today.

One is **Xmas** – families gathering, presents being opened, eating & drinking a lot, maybe backyard cricket, maybe a nap after lunch ...

The other event being celebrated today is **Christmas**, remembering the birth of Jesus who came to show us God's ways of love and kindness and care ...

BIBLE READING

Isaiah 9:6-7

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and for ever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.

Luke 2:8-19

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel,

praising God and saying,

‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.’

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

MESSAGE Living out the Christmas story

Christmas is a time of joy, peace, love and hope ... but these things seem to have been in short supply this past year.

It’s always difficult to compare one year with another, but this past year has **felt tougher** than most, whether we think about ...

- Our **weekly budget** where the cost of nearly everything has gone up
- The cost of finding **somewhere to live**, whether renting or buying and how difficult this is for our young people
- The **truly terrible wars** that rage and that are reducing whole countries to rubble and killing thousands of innocent people ... whether in Gaza or Ukraine or Sudan or Myanmar, while the rest of the world looks on and watches with horror
- The **state of the world’s climate** that continues to break heat records and is becoming more and more erratic and intense



The message of Christmas is that in the **midst** of all these problems and difficulties, God **chooses** to draw near to us in Jesus.



The classic Christmas readings from the Bible that we have just heard give voice to the hopes of God’s people down through the centuries.

The names and titles speak of a figure who will not just challenge the status quo of the world but bring in a new era of peace and justice.

This figure will be a **Wonderful Counsellor** or comforter, the **Prince who brings peace**, who will be a **Saviour** and **Messiah**, and who, mysteriously, will have such a close connection with God that they can be named as **Lord**, the most common name for **God** in the Bible.



Such a figure would be a **mighty hero** who would surely shake up the powerful leaders of the world. That was certainly the hope of God’s people.



Yet this saving figure is born at the **margins** among **poor people**, born into a **vulnerable human family**.

That is **how** and **where** God chose to come among us.

So at Christmas we remember a **baby**, born in humble circumstances to faithful Mary and Joseph, visited by shepherds who were considered low class ordinary people. This baby boy would have been long forgotten in the mists of history if not for the remarkable things he said and did.

Jesus showed us the **heartbeat of God**, reaching out to others with **compassion** and **kindness** and instinctively embracing people with **love**.



Jesus did have **harsh words for some** – especially for the powerful and privileged who looked after their own needs, but who failed to extend justice and mercy to others.



The coming of Jesus into the world showed us an **alternative way to live** – a way where power and privilege give way to **care and concern** for others, where the hungry are fed and the poor are noticed and have a name.

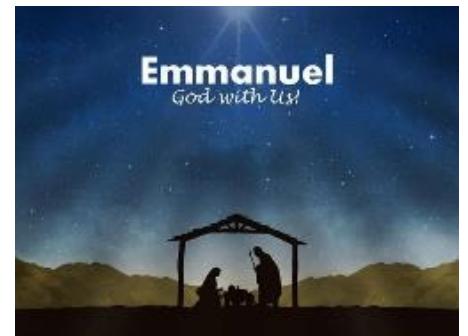
Jesus, justice and love go hand in hand.

This alternative way of living – that Jesus invites us to embrace – takes us to the **margins**, takes us to the often **invisible** people whether they are women, children, foreigners, the elderly or the poor – and asks us to **welcome** them, **accept** them and **love** them.



That's both the **joy** and the **challenge** of Christmas.

We get to celebrate that this baby is truly **Emmanuel**, God with us, coming to bring hope and peace, and showing us a new way to live and relate to each other.



May our hearts be filled with **joy** as God comes close to us in Jesus.



But we are also encouraged to see the **vulnerability** of God showing up in the form of a human baby. It took great courage, faith and love to become so vulnerable and live a fully human life.

Today – and every day – God invites us to make **ourselves** vulnerable and to **embrace the heartbeat of God** that Jesus showed us – **inclusive, generous, compassionate love** alongside a **hunger for justice** – and to live out these habits among our everyday acquaintances and in the midst of our everyday routines. That's the great **challenge** of Christmas.