

## Christmas Day

25-12-2022

St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Isaiah 9: 2-7	Prophecy of a Child to bring Light
Isaiah 62:6-12	Salvation is coming
Psalm 96	Sing to the Lord a new song – He comes to judge
Psalm 97	The Lord is King, Let the Earth rejoice
Titus 2: 11-14	The grace of God has appeared in Jesus and helps us to live worthy lives until he comes again
Titus 3: 4-8a	Jesus saves us and pours his Spirit on us
Luke 2:1-14	Jesus is born, and shepherds see angels
Luke 2: 8-20	Shepherds see angels and then visit Jesus

### Introduction

At the liturgy to begin the midnight mass, we have a candle lit in darkness and the minister proclaims:-

“Jesus Christ is the Light of the World”

This is a bold statement. Christians proclaim that Jesus is not “a” light, or “one of” the lights, but rather “the” light. Christmas began as the celebration of the birth of the child Jesus, that is Jesus, coming into the world.

As we celebrate Christmas, I would like to explore the Incarnation, and I would then like to look at how the Incarnation of Jesus gives us Hope.

### Incarnation

So let us explore the incarnation.  
Firstly, what does the word incarnation mean?

I recall, when I was young thinking that it may have had something to do with “Carnation Milk”, you know the tins of sweetened condensed milk that you boil up to make the filling for caramel tarts. I spoke to someone once who thought it might be a bit like “reincarnation” – the Hindu belief that after this life you come back as some other form of life or animal.

Of course, both of these ideas are very far from the mark, and have nothing to do with what Christians believe when we talk about the Incarnation.

The Macquarie Dictionary gives us this definition for the word “incarnate”:-

“embodied in flesh; invested with a body, especially a human form.

And the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church uses this first line, in it’s article on “The Incarnation”:-

“The Christian Doctrine of the Incarnation affirms that the eternal Son of God took human flesh from His human mother and that the historical Christ is at once fully God and fully human.”

Throughout the history of religions and religious thought, and especially in Greek mythology, we hear of “Gods” taking on human form, but the Christian belief of the incarnation is very different to anything that has come before it.

As Christians we believe in one God, and that we know that one God in the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We believe we can know this specifically because Jesus, the Son, became a human to communicate this with us.

Magpies breed in the spring, and we’ve recently had a number of juveniles hanging around our veranda beside the Bowls Club. I was feeding them, but then stopped, as the large adult magpies started coming and taking all the mince, and then the Currawongs also got in on the act. I stopped because I couldn’t communicate with them about sharing it, and it was too hard to split them up. I don’t speak Magpie, or Currawong either, for that matter.

God became a human being like us, in Jesus, so that God could speak to us. Jesus came to let us know, that even though, in our fallen human nature, we are cut off from God, in Jesus, we can be reconciled with God. Jesus came to let us know how much God loves us.

So, at Christmas time, we recall that Jesus, both fully God and fully human, was born to Mary and became one of us, for us.

We can never claim that God has left us alone, or that in God’s awesomeness, God could never really understand us. Even though God is the creator of everything, God chose to be one of us, in Jesus, and all for our benefit.

The incarnation is about God becoming human, so that we, as mere human beings, can know the way to God, and be reconciled with God.

## Hope

Of course, Jesus didn't remain a baby. Jesus grew up and became an adult. Jesus remains to this day, arguably the human being, who has had the most influence on recorded human history. And yet he never held an earthly position of power or authority. It has been said that Jesus produced the greatest teachings the world has ever know. And yet, as far as we know, nothing written down by Jesus himself, has been found. Jesus died a humiliating death on a Roman cross, and just when it seemed like all hope had been lost, Jesus' disciples found that he had been raised from the dead.

It was in the resurrection of Jesus, that those first disciples of Jesus were given Hope, and this Hope was infectious. It wasn't a hope based on wishful thinking, or some vague philosophical idea. Rather, it was a hope based on the experience they had of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in their lives.

If we could get to God in our own strength, or by our own will, then we wouldn't need Jesus.

As fallible human beings who know that our physical lives will at some point end, we are hard wired to search for hope beyond ourselves. It was through Jesus that those first disciples found Hope, and it is through Jesus today that we also, can find Hope. And in Romans chapter five we are told that Hope does not disappoint us.

I recall when I was first ordained, and I was speaking with the priest who was overseeing my training, about one of our parishioners who had terminal cancer. I said something to the effect, "I know her situation is hopeless." He looked at me with a look that said, "Go and wash your mouth out with soap." As Christians our situation is never hopeless. Being young and healthy, I had foolishly only been thinking of the physical. It was a good learning experience for me. One of the more powerful ministry experiences I have had, of the wonderful Hope we have in God, is when I baptized a lady, and then conducted her funeral less than four months later. It was a privilege to witness the Hope she had in Jesus, and the courage and peace this Hope gave her, even in the face of death.

You may be thinking, "Why all this talk about death?", when Christmas is about the birth of Jesus. Well Hope is not the absence of fear or difficulties. Rather, Hope is a gift from God, that allows us to deal with the real world, that we face each day. In recent years we have had fire and floods, covid and economic turmoil. The real world around us brings many challenges, but I believe that having a Hope with which to live our lives, comes through knowing the Jesus who comes to us at Christmas time.

## Application of Hope

So, what might having this Hope, ask of us in our lives?

Just as God entered our world through the person of Jesus, so that we might have Hope, God sends us into the world so that others might come to know Jesus, and also have this Hope.

The first followers of Jesus were known as disciples. A disciple is a follower, a learner, so we are called to follow Jesus, to learn from Jesus, and to share the hope that Jesus gives us, with others.

The incarnation is all about relationship. God became a human being so that we could know and experience God in our lives.

In our relationships, with those around us, we are called to bring God's Hope.

Christmas is known for being a time of sharing peace and good will, so we are also called to be bearers of peace and goodwill to others.

## Conclusion

As we gather today to celebrate the birth of Jesus, let us think about the significance of the Incarnation and the Hope that it brings.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, as we seek to enjoy sharing time with family and friends, may we continue to be filled with, and share, God's Hope.

May you have a Happy, a Holy, and a Blessed Christmas. Amen.