

CHRISTMAS IS VERY ORDINARY (22nd December 2019, Lindfield)

LUKE 1:26-35,38

As Christmas draws ever closer we rush around with so much to do. Are the family coming to our place this year? What to have for Christmas lunch? The drought has made the prices of pork, beef and lamb soar. Turkey is a possibility. Should we have sea food this year? Will it be too hot to eat outside?

Then there's those families with difficult relationships. One couple on the verge of breaking up; a boyfriend who no-one else likes; an uncle who always drinks too much and causes an argument; someone who has lost a partner or child and facing their first Christmas without them. Decorations, gift buying, special food on and on it goes. We get to the point where we wish it was just all over.

That's not the way to celebrate the birth of the Christ child. In the middle of all we do to make this a special time of year, there is also much that is very ordinary about Christmas. Perhaps we can re-capture some of its uniqueness by concentrating on what was ordinary about it.

First, Mary was a very ordinary girl. Matthew hardly mentions her and when he does it is in the context of Joseph wanting to do the honourable thing. Luke goes into extravagant detail. But all that is said about Mary is that she had found favour with God. Mary was a faithful, religious girl, probably between 12-15 years old. She was picked out of the blue to bear the Christ Child. There no doubt were hundreds of girls who would have fitted the bill just as well. An ordinary girl, chosen for a special task.

Second, the birth was announced to ordinary men Shepherds in the fields looking after the sheep. A common sight. Shepherds were not highly regarded people. Most of them had a reputation of being lazy and not putting their lives on the line for the sheep. That's why Jesus is called the "Good Shepherd". That's why his parable of leaving the 99 sheep to search for 1 that was lost would have been regarded as ridiculous. Heaven opened up, not to King Herod or the Chief Priest but to ordinary men of little reputation. They went and found it all exactly as it had been told them. They returned praising God.

Third, the birth was in a very ordinary place Not at home where it would normally have happened. There was no mid-wife or even Mary's mother or sister who may not have even been in Bethlehem at the time. In a

feeding trough, in a stable with her fiancé and some animals. Hardly an auspicious beginning. It's a wonder Jesus didn't die from infection.

An ordinary mother in an ordinary place and the birth announced to ordinary people just doing their job. I feel sorry for Mary, having her firstborn under such circumstances. But many women today have children under similar or even worse circumstances. Think of women giving birth on Manus Is. or Narau. If anything goes wrong there's now no guarantee they will receive proper medical care. Women giving birth in Syria or even Palestine - what future will these children have?

Yet the ordinariness of the birth of Jesus gives us hope.

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It gives us hope because we do not need to be especially religious or come from a line of ultra-religious people to be part of God's plan. God can and does choose us and use us to fulfil His purpose. Your life puts you in contact with many people neither I nor Pastor Brian will ever know. You can be God's person, God's witness in showing them how a Christian can live out their faith in this world. Your conversations devoid of judgement, racism, criticism, malice, prejudice etc can provide a very strong alternative to what is heard much of the time. Being a Christian in your workplace, in your home, with your neighbours and friends can be very powerful.

We don't need to have a special platform from which to speak, although these days social media does give all of a platform of sorts. We don't need any special position of authority or influence, We just need to be who we are.

The story of the shepherds is appealing to me because of its ordinariness. Their faith was not just theoretical. They did not just believe their creeds or learn their scriptures by heart where the faith was a matter of intellectual assent. They heard and they went to investigate for themselves. Why did they go back praising God? Because what they saw was just as it had been told to them. They experienced God's word for themselves and it caused them to praise God. So it is with us. It is not enough just to know the creeds and the scriptures but we must experience it as well. We understand more about prayer when we experience God's answers to our prayers. We understand more of God's promises when we experience God's work in our lives. We realise that these things are so.

There's nothing wrong with making Christmas a special time. Being with family and friends, sharing food together, giving and receiving gifts and all

the other things we do BUT let us also realise that what was very ordinary in the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus are the very things that make it meaningful and relevant to us. The Christmas story fills us with hope and confidence that God is alive and active not only in a stable over 2,000 years ago but here, today in your life and mine. Jesus, the name means saviour is also Emmanuel – GOD WITH US.
AMEN

