

**THE SERMON I NEED TO HEAR** (25<sup>TH</sup> December 2019, Lindfield)

**MATTHEW 1:18-25**

This year Christmas seems different somehow, We make the same arrangements we do from year to year, we do the same sorts of things but it's not quite as festive. I'm sure it has much to do with the drought and the bushfires. We don't remember so many severe fires so early in the Summer. They are more fierce, more widespread, more damaging than I can ever remember. Firefighters and others killed, hundreds have lost their homes and businesses: the disruption, the sadness, the anger, the grief, the exhaustion, the dislocation, the platitudes and the empty words that give no comfort, no empathy, no understanding. There will be so many families that won't be celebrating Christmas like they used to. So many families whose father or mother are away fighting fires. It doesn't seem like the time to be celebrating.

I want to suggest it is EXACTLY the time to be celebrating Christmas. I want to suggest that it is for times like these that Jesus came in the first place.

I know of no historical sources that explain why Caesar Augustus decided to hold a census. It could have been just plain vanity – wanting to know the extent of his power. More generously, it could have been to know and then plan for the defence of the Empire or to decide on what infrastructure was needed and where. Whatever the reason we can be certain that he knew nothing of an unwed teenage mother in the far flung corner of his Empire and what inconvenience his census would have on her.

Matthew tells us almost nothing about Mary. He just writes that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit and that Joseph should not refuse to take her as his wife and then she had the baby and named him Jesus. While Luke gives more details, Matthew is just concerned to say that Jesus was born and it fulfilled a prophecy.

Matthew goes on to show that this baby was born to change the world! Jesus' birth was the first sign of what was to come. The claim that the birth of a baby to an unwed teen amid the squalor of a backwater town could possibly matter sounds crazy and yet, there, in a nutshell, is the promise of the Gospel: that God regularly shows up where we least expect God to be and always for us.

What was going through Mary's mind while all this was happening? Why here? Why now? Why do I have to name him Jesus? What does it mean that he will be a "saviour"?

Singer Anthony Callea sings a song about this very question. It's on his Christmas Album. You have the words. It's called, "Mary Did You Know". Listen to the song.

The line that really got to me was, *when you kissed your little baby you kissed the face of God*. Theologians will argue about the accuracy of that from a theological point of view, but how powerful. No wonder we read that Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

So though this world seems darker this year. Events right at our back door cast a shadow over Christmases we've known before, the world, Australia, we, are NOT

forsaken, and the headlines we read and worry about will have their day. The rain will come. The fires will be extinguished, the drought will break, and they will eventually take less a place in the news reports and in our consciousness and the story that has been told for over 2000 years will still be as fresh and relevant as ever before. God still loves us! And God will not give up on his world – or us. Moreover, God continues to come to love and bless this very world and invites us to do the same.

So many of us struggle to see God through times like these. So many more wonder where God is amid their own private pain and suffering. We wonder, if only in our private moments, whether God, if he is there, could make any difference anyway? Yet the essence of the Christmas message and of the Gospel itself is that first and foremost we should look to Jesus. Then we will see that God is all about hope, grace and peace. Even though that all seems improbable, even unlikely, is it too good to be true? But not simply because of the Christmas story, but of the entire life of Jesus as shown in the Gospel records, it IS true. This is the story we can keep coming back to, hoping against hope, and even believing, that God so loved the world, that God so loved me, that he sent his only begotten son. That's why the headlines shouldn't dampen our Christmas celebrations, in fact we would be way better off if the message of Christmas guided our headlines. AMEN

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