

Sermon – Christmas Day

Luke 2:1-20

On this day where we celebrate the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ we might take some time to reflect on what his birth actually meant for the world. Today is a day of remembering that miraculous event now some 2,000 years ago. It is as significant for us today as it was for those first witnesses who gathered in the stable, by the manger, to greet the new baby.

The world in which we live is constantly changing. As each moment passes in our lives the world moves forward powered by the regenerative energy of creation. The present, fleeting as it is, becomes the past in an instant. The future is always before us to bear upon us and to shape our lives. In the remembering of the past we bring events back to the present so that they can shape us and transform us, otherwise why would we remember.

When each of us was born we were born with the power to change the world. The world is different because we each exist and will change again when we die. Each child's life definitely matters and each child's life impacts the world by impacting us.

When I was a young boy my closest cousin gave birth to her second child. I was just old enough to understand what was happening and to share in the joy with my cousins. A few days after her son was born I overheard my mother on the phone speaking to her sister. Something was up.

A few more days past before I came to understand that not all was well with her son and that he had been diagnosed with Down Syndrome. His mother, a devout Roman Catholic, was shattered and was considering giving him up to social services. Our families were deeply impacted by this crisis. In the end they decided not to give him up and started the process of learning how to care for and raise a disabled son. He became the light of their lives and throughout his 21 years of life he shaped a lot of lives, mine included.

More recently, many children, full of potential and hope, have been arriving on our southern border, unaccompanied by parents. Many very young children arrive along with the not so young, often older siblings caring for the younger ones. The welcome they received was anything but warm. Many are routed to detention centers where they languish and some were denied even their basic needs. Fear abounds and acceptance seems a long way off.

In Canada though, a trial program matched refugee families with private sponsor families who worked closely with them to help them integrate into their new community. The children were accepted and therefore were able to embrace their new life almost without fear. The children and families received by Canada experienced positive transformation because of how each experienced the intense and intimate integration program.

Mary was a young girl too, not much older than many child refugees today, when she was visited by the angel Gabriel who told her she'd be blessed with this new child. Initially perplexed by this news, Mary acquiesced after learning her cousin Elizabeth had also become pregnant in her old age. Mary's life started to be transformed, and also that of her husband Joseph.

Joseph, like my cousin, was initially unsure of what to do and whether to accept the child. He thought it best to quietly uncouple his wagon from Mary and allow her to face the shame of her pregnancy alone. After further celestial encouragement he agreed to stay and support Mary and raise this new child.

Every day there are about 350,000 babies born in our world. Most of these babies live and many grow to lead average lives in their communities. A few will become leaders in their communities and some leaders in their countries. Some will become wealthy whilst others will become poor. Some will be transformative scientists or technology revolutionaries whilst others will grow fruit and vegetables so we can eat, or build our houses so we can find shelter. We need everyone and each newborn has a purpose.

We often say that a newborn or young child is the light of our lives, implying that the child, this small fragile dependent being, somehow gives us purpose and meaning. Many of you will know that feeling. The child becomes light in that they manage to deepen our emotions and maturity as we watch them grow and develop. All these children will impact the world by their lives through the light that they cast.

Each year in our retelling of the miraculous birth of Jesus we remember this unique child, and how he came into the world to rescue us from ourselves. Jesus was unique in that he carried "the exact imprint of God's very being," the writer of Hebrews says, and that "he sustains all things by his powerful word." God emptied God's self of this divine power and became fully human in Jesus, to fulfill the prophecy of old that God would come into the world to save us.

God, incarnate in Jesus, was life, life in its fullest sense, and this life was the light of the world. Jesus later taught the meaning of life when he gave us the great commandment to "love God with all of our hearts, and to love our neighbor as ourselves." Jesus the Christ child is the light to enlighten everyone, and all who receive him and believe in his name will be given power to become children of God and will inherit life in its fullest.

One small vulnerable child, born in a dark and dank stable to an itinerant young unwed couple grew to transform the world and so transforms us. Through our transformation we can continue to transform the world, as the catalyst of the never-ending cycle of new creation. Pope Francis has said that "God's way of salvation is based on transformation not exclusion. God's way of salvation is based on love and forgiveness which is meant to heal us, not to punish and reject us." We can say a big 'amen' to that!

In the midst of our retelling of this Christmas story for this year, and the remembering of the birth of Jesus, we as a Christian community learn how Jesus transforms the world by

transforming us. We are called to be the light and salt for a broken world, to be the leaven in the bread. We are the power that changes the world. The ripples of Jesus birth started moving out from the manger almost immediately. From the humblest shepherds to the wealthiest wise men and kings, the world was about to change because of this young baby.

God has come amongst us in human flesh and we surrender if we can, to change our ways, continually standing in the present washed clean by the saving grace of God, facing a future together where we can work to bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice, peace, love and reconciliation, as Dr King told us.

The joy for us as we gather together this morning to remember and celebrate this child's birth is that the light that is Jesus, is now the light that shines from us. We are transformed by this light into the children of God and thus, we are continuing to transform the world into a better place for all.

A blessed Christmas season to you all!

Amen