

Happy Christmas – it really is a wonderful morning, albeit a little unusual.

I suspect for many of us, our Christmas morning has been different this year – for others very little may have changed. But in all the conversations I have had this week, and all the public discourse in the media about the demise of Christmas, and who we can and cannot share with, it has made me reflective on what our expectations of Christmas Day might be? However it is, Christmas is a time of expectation.

What makes Christmas? Carols sung in church? Time with too much family or not enough family? Bulging Dinner tables full of rich foods we wouldn't normally eat. Presents, Christmas trees, singing, games, fights, tension, headaches, old movies. What are the things that make up Christmas for you? Depending on your circumstance, today may be no different. A meal with those in your house – and for some that will be a meal alone. Of like wombat, that Nativity play!

All of this pondering about Christmas has made me nostalgic – and remember some of my best and worst Christmases. I remember the Christmases of my childhood which were for the most part hot and sultry, and being crowded into room with all my relatives eating a baked dinner. Then after lunch playing cricket with all my cousins next to the willow tree. I remember Christmases as a young adult, the first time I had Christmas away from my immediate family – I felt so grown up – but also uncertain. There were Christmases with strangers, when I first arrived in London and was invited by some people who are now friends, but then I barely knew to share Christmas with them. I have shared Christmas dinner with many different people over the years, some strangers, I have even eaten Christmas dinner alone. And what I realised was that in all these memories – regardless of the circumstance – it was still Christmas.

Christmas is a time which has many expectation lumped upon it. But I think one of the joys of the Christmas message is that however we encounter Christmas it, like birth and stables, is messy!! It is a festival that comes both with too many, and sometimes too little, expectations or hopes.

No act of God in time and history gives us more reason to hope than the birth of Jesus. At the right time and in the most undeniable and unforgettable way, God becomes human and dwells amongst us. God comes to share in our humanity so that we might have a glimpse, even the smallest glimpse of God's divinity. In the birth of Jesus - the word of God becomes flesh and lives amongst us. Jesus did not come so that we could have a Christmas Card perfect life – Jesus came into the fullness of our humanity – into its chaos and squashy moments, into times which are challenging, like now, as well as its moments of joy and love – so that we might also see what God is like! In the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus we receive a

permanent glimpse of God, and in him we came to know more about God than has ever been known, before or since. And this glimpse of God shines a light of hope through all generations.

The prologue to John's Gospel from which we always read on Christmas Day records the birth Christ, not as the story of the nativity, but as the fulfilment of what took place at the Creation of the world. John's gospel is all about the community indwelling with each other and with God. It is not about how individuals claim Jesus, but rather how God claims humanity through Christ - how God lives in the greatest intimacy with his followers. For John, it was vital that we understand that God has come for the whole of creation that we might know the light and hope of God both in this life and the next.

In the birth of Jesus, God has truly entered the human condition, a human condition that is not all clean and lovely, warm and welcoming as some Christmas cards would have us believe. Rather God enters earth as we do - in the noise of child birth, into the struggles of humanity. God enters a world like ours which has to contend with disease and fear, as well as hope and love. But the important thing to remember in this is not the mess BUT that God came to earth to be one of us, to be amongst - to be Emmanuel - God with us!!

Earlier we hear read the story Wombat Divine - it is my favourite Christmas story - full of joy and excitement of being part of the story. I love this story because it rings true, for the whole Christmas message - like wombat - we become part of the story. The story of Christmas starts with the birth of Jesus, but it continues in the way we live it out - the way share the story with each other. And in a year like 2020, it is important for us to hold on to this promise. God is part of our story, and we are part of God's. Whatever challenges we face today and in the weeks again - God is with us.

The joy of the nativity is expressed in the opening of John's Gospel - the joy of telling the story - the joy of sharing good news! Does it really matter if we make it messy or tidy, whether it's the way it was last year or next- provided we know the heart of the truth of the story - Jesus was born on earth to allow us to know God more fully - and God invites us to be part of the story; and to continue to tell that story over and over again!

So this Christmas let us remember the love of Emmanuel, God-with-us - made tangible for God's people day after day through our love for each other. But most importantly, the birth of Jesus invites us to be part of God's story, invites us to tell our story, and recreate this story of love in new ways, as we are doing this Christmas. May you find your part in this story today. Amen

We are now going to listen to a version of the First Noel which invites us to consider that God is with us in this story today.