

Christmas Eve  
Year A - December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 - 11.00pm

Isaiah 9:2-7  
Psalm 96  
Titus 2:11-14  
Luke 2:1-14

**In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...**

I'm not sure, in my position, that I should have favourites really, but I'd have to say that this is my favourite service of the whole year. The quiet and joyful anticipation; the candles; the centrality of the stable and the manger; the Carols, and above all else, the story...

I'm a sucker for a good story, and this is one of the best. It's full of emotion and drama; it has twists and turns you never see coming; it has characters full of depth and complexity; it has suspense and, I hope I don't spoil it for anyone, but it does have a happy ending... of sorts!

One of the things about a good story is that it draws you in. It leaves you wondering about how the different characters are feeling, why they make the decisions they do, and what happens to them after the story is finished.

There are certainly many opportunities in this story to do that sort of wondering. Think about how many of the major characters in the Christmas story have their lives changed, completely turned around, by the events of Christmas. How, for many of them, their life is never the same again.

Consider the stories of those who let God lead them beyond the lives they had known: Mary, who offered her stunning yes to the invitation to become the mother of Christ. Elizabeth, who opened herself to new life in her great age and who welcomed and waited with her young kinswoman.

Joseph, who paid attention to his dreaming and gave his own radical yes as he cast his lot with Mary and her child.

Shepherds who left their fields to respond to the tidings of angels. Wise Ones who turned their faces starward and departed from their far country to welcome the Christ.

And sometimes, if the story is really good, you can even imagine what it would be like if **you** were part of the story, and think about what role you would play.

Well, tonight, my invitation to you, as we gather in the quiet of this beautiful place, is to consider your role in this narrative. And to do that I share with you a simple piece of wisdom from the American theologian, Neal Maxwell, who says this: “Each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room” - Neal A. Maxwell

“Each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room”. One of the things, perhaps unwritten, but certainly assumed and felt in the story of Christmas, is the increasing anxiety and dread that must have filled Joseph and Mary as they went about Bethlehem, seeking somewhere to stay.

As they went past the countless signs that said “no vacancy”; as they were dismissed by those hosts who shut the door on them - “no room for you”, in spite of Mary’s obvious situation and dire need, one can only imagine the desperation they were feeling. Where would they end up? Would Mary have to give birth in a gutter? Would the baby survive the cold of the night?

“Each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room”

Finally, they were welcomed. Finally they found some compassion and understanding. A person who, although they could not offer them a warm bed, at least gave what they could - safe, dry lodging. Somewhere to lie down.

Every day we make choices in our lives - about our priorities, how we will live our lives; what we will do with our lives. And if we are all, truly, the innkeeper, we also have a choice as to how much we allow God into our lives. And we have a choice as to how the Christmas story will change us.

It is often in the darkest of times that we see the best in humanity - witness the stories of generosity in our local community in the past few days since the terrible bushfires in the hills. People offering accommodation for those displaced; offers of land and transport for livestock and horses who have lost their grazing lands; donation centres being forced to stop taking donations because they were simply overwhelmed by the sheer volume of what had been given already. And the one that really undid me this morning, the CFS volunteer whose own house burned down, because she was next door trying to save her neighbour's property.

But why must we seemingly only respond in times of extreme need? Where is our everyday response to the crisis of homelessness that is a blight on our city? Where do we find room in our lives to care about the children who fall behind at school because their parents can't afford to buy essential supplies or feed them a decent breakfast. Where is our outrage at the treatment of those who look different to us, or the apparent lack of concern by those in power for our beautiful creation?

As we celebrate this holy night, let us open ourselves up to at least the possibility that this Christmas this year is going to change us; that in the joy of this humble event of a child being born in a simple stable, we might indeed be changed - that we might remember that we are innkeeper, who has a choice.

Even in the darkest night, the light of Christ was born - it shone, and will shine still. He is the light of the world. And the light of his love shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not, cannot, and will not overcome it.

To you, and to your families and your loved ones I extend the blessing of the Word made Flesh - may Christ be born anew in you, and his light guide you in your lives ahead. May the Lord be with you on this most Holy Night. And may your life never be the same again... Amen