

Emmanuel God With Us

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on Christmas Day 2021)

Here we are again, celebrating Christmas, remembering the story that is foundational to our faith. A time of the year that should be one of wonder and joy but so often is hijacked and becomes one of frenzy, frustration, strained relationships and tiredness.

In that sense we are no different from the characters present at that first Christmas. That first Christmas occurred in the midst of political trouble, in the midst of poverty, in the midst of fear and in unusual, even questionable circumstances. Joseph, Mary and the shepherds have all moved from initial surprise and even fear, to taking it all in their stride as they each make their way to Bethlehem. But once confronted with the child their fear gives way to joy, to sharing the news with all, just as the angels announced.

I invite you this morning to think about that first Christmas, to ponder the birth of the Christ Child.

A little baby lying in a feeding trough, wrapped in simple cloths, gazed upon by his young parents, surrounded by strangers and animals, in a place far from home.

A fragile little child.

A life to be lived, full of promise and potential.

A life facing as many risks as any life faces.

This is Christmas, this is how God comes to the world.

We will call this child Emmanuel – God with us. He will be known as the Prince of Peace.

Surrounding the baby, a teenage Mary full of wonder, quiet acceptance and gratitude. A proud father Joseph, who will do all the angel has told him. Shepherds who cannot contain their joy as they see in reality that which the angels of God told them.

Surrounding the scene, the promise of peace.

John tells us that it is here that the Word, the Logos, the Christ pitched his tent amongst us! He became a human being, he became one of us, sharing our hopes and dreams, experiencing our joys and sorrows.

In that child God comes to us in the middle of the ordinary, in the everyday. In that child God comes to us in the midst of political trouble. In that child everything changes – the past, the present and the future are all viewed through this event. In that child God meets us. In that child we see that miracles can occur in the most unexpected

places, that fear can turn to joy, that in the midst of chaos and messiness can come peace, hope, love and joy

Our world has this year continued to be messy, chaotic. We have known fear and uncertainty. Some places have experienced abject horror as their countries have been taken over by unjust regimes or natural disasters. It is into these very situations that God comes alongside, sharing the joys and sorrows, understanding the fear. It is precisely into these places that God wills peace.

So, as we ponder the birth of Jesus let us be reminded of the many who find themselves in circumstances just like him – born and housed into poverty, rejected by many, illegitimate and quickly becoming a refugee. As we think about the circumstances of his birth let us say a prayer for those who are fearful, who are poor, who wait for peace especially in Myanmar and Afghanistan, those who have fled their homelands, those who are homeless, lonely and abandoned.

In that first Christmas gift God gives his very self, a gift of hope, joy, love, surprise, peace and generosity. May you give and receive such a gift today.

Most of all may you know the deep, deep love offered to all by God in this baby called Jesus, Emmanuel – God with us. Amen.