

Love Comes in the Midst of Chaos (Preached by Rev Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on Advent 4C, 19th Dec 2021)

1

Love Comes in the Midst of Chaos
(Preached at Footscray Baptist Church on Advent 4C, 19th Dec 2021)

Visited by an angel, a teenage pregnancy, a partner who is ready to disown you – life for the young Mary is chaotic, confusing and full of controversy.

What was she to do? She decides to seek the counsel of an older relative. Elizabeth lives up in the hills and by a bizarre twist of fate is also with child. Her life is just as chaotic and confusing and to add to that husband has not spoken a word for months.

Mary spends three months in the hills, a safe place, far from the scandal and gossip. Time to contemplate the enormity of what has happened, what she has assented to - comparing notes with the older woman and coming to terms with the extraordinary way in which God had dealt with both of them. Whilst their lives are very different, their responses to God are very similar, both accept their situation and offer themselves up to God's plan, God's plan to remind the world that it is loved and cherished by God.

It is during her time with Elizabeth that Mary sings her song of praise – a song of thanks to God for his mercy and fulfilling his promises to the people, a song of an upside down kingdom where things are put right – the poor are no longer exploited, the hungry are fed and the rich and unjust get their comeuppance. A song of God's love, a song about turning the chaos of life for the poor upside down.

However, the chaos doesn't end at her return to Nazareth. She and Joseph have decided to stay together when they learn that they are required to undertake an arduous journey to another town to be counted. The timing couldn't have been worse, she was almost full term and she would have to travel with people she hardly knew, to a place she had never been – all to satisfy the government.

Upon their arrival in Bethlehem the chaos continued – masses of people everywhere and no spare rooms to stay in, never lone give birth. Eventually somebody took pity on them and let them stay with the animals in a shed out the back. More chaos ensued, the shed full of animals and a baby about to be born. The baby is born in a place and way Mary could barely have imagined – not surrounded by family and Elizabeth in her own space. And the chaos continued as a group of rugged shepherds with some sheep come to visit telling a tale of having been surprised by angels with a message about the baby. The very people that she knew God wanted to share his message of love with.

Soon after the birth, the chaos continues and she and Joseph and the baby learn their very lives are in danger because of a tyrant king, jealous, eager to keep hold of power. So, they become political refugees.

God's gift of love has come in the midst of chaos, in the midst of government directives, in the midst of uncertainty, in the midst of controversy.

The child in the manger, who is the ultimate sign of God's love for the world was born in an out of the way stable, in the midst of chaos and controversy. The child grows up and finds himself with the outcastes, on the wrong side of political power. His life personifies all that his mother sings about whilst she is staying with Elizabeth. He changes the world with his radical views on peace and love.

Love Comes in the Midst of Chaos (Preached by Rev Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on
Advent 4C, 19th Dec 2021)

2

Leunig writes – “Love is born with a dark and troubled face, when hope is dead and in the most unlikely place, love is born, love is always born.” In the story of Mary love is born on the outskirts of town, in the midst of chaos, in the midst of a world hoping for peace and justice.

Love is born amongst unlikely people, in an unlikely place, amidst unlikely circumstances. God comes as love despite the difficult political situation and chaos.

God comes to us in the midst of chaos and controversy both then and now. This is how God is with us. This is the kind of love we need to emulate.

As we move toward Christmas Day, let us ponder this kind of love of which Mary speaks. Love that upsets the apple cart, that lifts up the poor and lowly and scatters the proud in their own imaginations.

In a world which so often in the last couple of years has felt really chaotic let us love. Let us love those housed in poverty, love those who live in fear, love those who long for peace and justice. Let us love those who are without a safe place to live and love those who feel forgotten and abandoned. Let us love those who find themselves caught up in scandals. God who is love, came to such as these at the first Christmas and using us will come to such as these in the present.

And today and into the new year may the hope, peace, joy and love of that first Christmas be yours. Amen.