



First Sunday after Christmas

30th December 2012

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26, Psalm 148, Colossians 3:12-17, Luke 2:41-52

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Following the service, one Christmas morning, the sacristan, the person helping to clean up after the service, said to me; “thank God that’s all over for another year”, and the same or similar comment is made every year. This year it was “well that’s Christmas finished again”. And my guess is, we all at some point, or some place, have a similar voice or thought. Christmas is over and we can put it all away, clean up the mess, and finish the left overs and get on with moving toward the new year.

In the week before Christmas we received fifteen health profiles that were completed for the fifteen children at the orphanage we are supporting through IGWR in Kathmandu. Bear with me as this is somewhat repetitive, but I want to share the opening sentence from some of the profiles; because in the repetition there is a message that illustrates the word of life in today’s readings.

Stuti – 2 years old - She was rescued by Community Police Center, Tundaldevi. She was admitted on 29/09/2010 AD.

Aakash Balak – 15months old - He was found in Siraha and brought through Child center welfare board (CCWB). He was discovered all wounded and bruised.

Shaily - She was rescued by Community Police Center, Tundaldevi. She was only about a week when she was recovered.

Nirman – 2 years old - **He** was discovered by police and handed over

Manish Thapa – nearly 3 years old - **He** was found in KMC hospital suffering from Tuberculosis. His father had passed away before his birth

Prayas -4 years old - **He** was discovered by police of Kalopole and handed over

The other nine profiles all read the same or very similar. The story of these abandoned children serves as a timely reminder to us, a reminder that we should not abandon the baby.

In the church calendar we are today celebrating the First Sunday of Christmas; we are still very much in the liturgical season of Christmas. Next Sunday we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany, which marks the last of the twelve days of Christmas. Tradition will have us pack away our decorations and take down the Christmas tree on the twelfth night. And at that point most will also abandon the baby! Most will forget the newborn in the manger. And most will lose sight of that which is birthed. And so too the activity of the Divine.

Christmas is a season of creation and an iconic, ritual time for us to be very much in touch with the birthing of creation and of ourselves. The whole notion and process of creation is re-emphasised for us again on New Year’s Eve; again we encounter the opportunity of beginning,

of creation. Some will resolve to do different things in the New Year as they make their promises of resolution.

However 'birth' and the Nativity and the iconic child of Bethlehem are not so much about 'doing' as they are about 'being'. What "being" was conceived in the Christmas nativity? Although told as a story of the birth of Christ, it is really an icon, an illustration of what is revealed in and through Christ. In the manger we see the holiness of humanity and we see our own holiness given form, manifested as a reality to be realised. Do we really see ourselves brought to light in the manger of holiness? Or do we wait till twelfth night and abandon the baby?

The first reading today speaks of Samuel growing; "*both in stature and in favour with the LORD and with the people*". The gospel speaks of Jesus growing; "*in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour*". Here, with repetition, we are reminded that 'birth' is the initiation of growth; it is not the whole show, but rather the opening scene. The Christmas nativity is our opening scene; it opens for us the possibility of living into the truth of our holiness.

In the second reading from Colossians we are given some guidelines for alignment, some course parameters as we set out to grow into our holiness of being. And it is a short reading about being that begins by addressing us all "*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved*". We are the ones that are birthed under the Epiphany star, and although illuminated from above, we must reveal ourselves, and make that manifest to the world. In the process we will experience a different worldview and see creation differently; we will humble kings and receive amazing gifts and riches. The reading is deliberate in calling us into process of growing; we are asked to *clothe* ourselves, and that will require us changing what we are already dressed in. It also implies that we will look different, we will be different and be seen as different in the eyes of others. That is what happens when we grow, we change, and move into a more complete fullness of ourselves. When we have put on our Christmas clothes, we are then given some reference points that will indicate our alignment with our new being, an integrity and integration of our very being that is birthed in the manger.

Will we abandon the baby or will we attend to that which is brought to birth?

Will we "*let the peace of Christ rule in [y]our hearts*"?

Will we "*be thankful.*"?

Will we "*Let the word of Christ dwell in [you]us richly*"?

The early simplistic understandings of Christmas, together with a secular embracing of Birthday and the associated giving of presents, has to a great extent devalued the true gift of Christmas. It is humanity in the manger, it is the Church in the manger, it is the body of Christ and it is the holiness of each and all of us that is birthed in that opening scene to our glorious life. Iranaeus sums up a post-Christmas understanding of the Glory of God; "The glory of God is a human person fully alive, and to be fully alive is to glorify God."

Christmas gives birth to our fullness of life and now on the First Sunday of Christmas we are invited to the next scene in the Divine life; we are invited to grow and to become the holiness that we have been created to embody and reflect.

It is easy to feel the sadness when we read of Aakash Balak, Shaily, Nirman, Manish Thapa, Prayas and others being abandoned. But what of the loss when we abandon even ourselves and each other? As we move toward Epiphany, and the making manifest all that is birthed, and as we

move into 2013, please don't abandon the baby, commit to growing and being fully alive to the Glory of God.

INCARNATION

It is not about becoming spiritual beings nearly as much as about becoming human beings. The biblical revelation is saying that we are already spiritual beings; we just don't know it yet. The Bible tries to let you in on the secret, by revealing God in ordinary time and place. That's why so much of the text seems so mundane, practical, specific and, frankly, unspiritual!

We have created a sad kind of dualism between the spiritual and the so-called non-spiritual. This dualism precisely is what Jesus came to reveal as a lie. The principle of Incarnation proclaims that matter and spirit have never been separate. Jesus came to tell us that these two seemingly different worlds are and always have been one. We just couldn't see it or dare to believe it until God put them together in one human body called Jesus (see Ephesians 2:11-20). (Richard Rohr)