

28th December 2014 – Christmas 1

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalm 148

Galatians 4: 4-7

Luke 2:22-40

[Christmas 1B December 28, 2014 Textweek](#)

Although called the first Sunday after Christmas let's remember we are still very much in the season of Christmas; after all, we've only just started exploring the whole icon of the nativity and probably are still wondering what is being brought to birth.

Today's readings, following close on the Christmas narratives, are worth some considered contemplation.

Isaiah's prophetic rejoicing in the first reading, obviously chosen to echo the rejoicing that accompanies the birth narratives, speaks of a new creation and birth: *"For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations."*

Isaiah looks, and sees, beyond the religious and socio-political paradigm of his time, he rejoices in the hope that is beyond the obvious, he looks beyond the boxing-day sales and rejoices in the unfolding of Christmas.

However this is not a prophet predicting a future Christmas, rather Isaiah speaks to a different 'Christmas process'; in a time long before the gospel birth narratives, he speaks to the people of Israel and he speaks of a coming home from exile, and of a tomorrow that *"shines out like the dawn, and ... like a burning torch"*

Isaiah's tomorrow is the view from the manger, it is what we glimpse in the silent night of Christmas before we are distracted and put back into our boxes on the day after Christmas...

Although Isaiah's message is for the people of Jerusalem, and is *"for Zion's sake"*; it goes beyond the status-quo and is for 'all the nations'. It is prophetic in that it speaks with an insight into the reality of eternity.... And perhaps that's why the gospel writers draw on Isaiah as they seek to document the revelation of Christ.

In the letter to the Galatians Paul is wrestling with an 'early church' issue; some 'new Christians' insisted that a convert to Christianity must first embrace Judaism, that a Christian must observe Mosaic law. Paul wrote this letter to affirm that Jesus reveals another paradigm; a new appreciation of faith that goes beyond ritual observances.

We can in reading such letters not only get a real feel for the emerging church and its theology, but also awaken our own emerging theology and find permission to challenge all that was previously understood. And then we come back to the ongoing 'Christmas narrative of Luke's gospel.

And in today's reading Luke really ties himself into a knot... he so wants to create a narrative to underline the special nature of Jesus, and yet he also wants to hold on to the authority of the past Jewish tradition...

So having created the delightful story of the birth under that star in Bethlehem, he now follows with a narrative that includes the rituals expected for all Jewish births; he documents that the child of Bethlehem is circumcised and then as we read today following circumcision there is the 'presentation in the temple'...

And that's where we have theological knot!

On the one hand we have the son of God, immaculately conceived, and then we have Jewish boy who needs to undergo rituals in order to part of the covenant people....

Luke introduces the character of Simeon in order to identify the child as "*the Lord's Messiah*" and so too as the fulfillment of Jewish expectation.

He then introduces us to Anna who "*began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem*"; so Anna provides an echo of Isaiah for those in the know.

Together the three readings today offer us a number of viewpoints, different perspectives for us to look at the unfolding of Christmas:

We can look prophetically and seek the beyond that is the invitation of the icon of the "Word made flesh, seeking to find ourselves in the image of God

We can wrestle with our past traditions and with what has been revealed in the coming of light and perhaps like Paul discover that we too are heirs to the estate of the manger.

And we can seek like Luke to make sense of the nativity with reference points from the traditions of the past, however again like Luke we should hold a purposeful intent on revealing a new creation, rather than justifying a long held self-righteous tradition....

The delight is that we have options, and for each of us the path ahead is likely to be quite different.

I'm going to take off with Joseph and Mary and with the same expectation that was with the child in the manger: *"The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him."* Perhaps this will take me to Galilee. However I also go with some confusion about where I am going: for I have also read Matthew's account of the time after Christmas and in that account it says:

"Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt"

So Galilee or Egypt, not sure; but I seek to move toward Easter, overcoming the confines of boxing-day and the distractions of the sales

Australians have a tradition of a Boxing-day test, but with only 20/20 vision they think it is a game of cricket, we have read today of boxing-days real test and have been offered some new insights that take us beyond the limited sight of our 20/20 vision...

May we all be together on our after-Christmas pilgrimage... and for those who did not hear the angel's affirmation to be without fear, know that on our journeying together we will have a Shepherd.

And that's a little segue to confirm that John Shepherd will be here next Sunday and we will all have a new opportunity to experience our movement toward Easter in a new way...

May we all make the most of this exciting time and this exciting journey....

Peter Humphris