

First Sunday after Christmas 27 Dec 2015

[Christmas 1](#) Textweek

1 Samuel 2: 18-20, 26

Psalm 148

Colossians 3: 12-17

Like a new-born child, we too might be wondering 'where are we' following the celebration of the nativity; and the liturgical calendar and readings for the Sundays after Christmas also seem, at first glance, to be all over the place....

Two days after celebrating the birth at the manger, the gospel gives us a story of a twelve year old Jesus attending the temple on his own; during the week we then go backwards and on Monday we have the feast of Holy innocents which recounts the killing of all two year old, and under, males by Herod. Next we have on January the first the naming and circumcision of the eight day old Jesus and five days later we have the epiphany and we're back to the manger of the nativity. So all in all, it's no wonder we're not sure where we are at this point in time.

Perhaps we are not reading a chronological documentary, but rather we are looking at insights revealed through the narrative of ancient stories.

Just as that possibility dawns, as we process the dream of the nativity in our Christmas slumber, we encounter the cultural pressures that seek to push us in another direction altogether.

Boxing day seems to be deliberately constructed to drive us back to the shops, and to replace the momentary 'giving' of Christmas with the bargains of gluttony that tempt us back into the paradigm of getting rather than giving; and for those less materialistic, they are driven back to the television tempted by a different sort of test and/or a new advent as the sailing camels leave Sydney for Hobart.

Indigestion, family arguments and hangovers are all part of the post-nativity narrative, and only come to end as the decorations are packed away on, or before twelfth night so that life can once again return to normal.

Thankfully, we are here, gathered again as one in the hope that we might continue the unfolding, the unwrapping, of Christmas' divine gift.

We recall the Nativity still echoing in our deepest being....

We acknowledge the gift of Light - the gift revealed in the Christ child

Each of us is called to the manger, to the place of the heavenly star

to the place of Love's birth, and to the place of our birth

The manger like the cross is the handwork of the tree, and so a reminder of the part we play in this divine story.

We do not come to remember the birth of another, rather we seek our Divine birth into the oneness of all.

We hold on to the insight of St John Chrysostom; "God is now on earth and we in heaven; on every side all things commingle."

And we look once again at the icon of the tree;, grounded and rooted in the earth and yet reaching and stretching toward heaven, the tree is an icon of humanity. Like the tree we reach toward heaven, but in the nativity we see where heaven reaches to us;

The word became flesh and dwelt among us

No longer do we reach for heaven, for now we are there, with the star of advent, we can embrace heaven for here we glimpse that all are held in the divine embrace revealed through Christ.

We turn again from the offer of worldly bargains, and look at the readings that initially seemed to be chronologically muddled.

The background to the first reading is important

Elkanah has two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah has borne him children, but for many years Hannah has been childless. Even so, Elkanah has loved her. After years of Peninnah's taunting, Hannah could take it no longer. During an annual pilgrimage to the temple at Shiloh, she has sought out Eli the priest; before him she has vowed that if God granted her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord, and she has trusted in God to grant her wish. After returning home, a son has been born to her and Elkanah. When Samuel is old enough (probably aged three or four), she has taken him to Eli, to serve in the Temple.

Today we read of Samuel's childhood. A "linen ephod" was an apron, a light ceremonial garment worn by a priest – so Samuel is now a priest. The couple continue to visit the temple each year. And the underlining in the story is that Hannah's "gift ... to the Lord" (v. 20) is her son.

Samuel grows up not in a home and family but "in the presence of the Lord".

This story predates the nativity by around 500-600 years (c.630–540BCE) and yet it has many of the same elements...

Hannah gives everything in accord with the Divine gift she has received, and her son, like Jesus in today's gospel is found at home in the temple.

This parallel chronology leads us into the insight of John Chrysostom; "on every side all things commingle."

Clocks are good for keeping time and so giving order for our lives, but they do not give our lives direction; if we use them for direction they can only take us to the grave.

At Christmas, most will have found themselves going back into childhood memories, and the very young, those without memories, will be taken to the grotto to sit on the knee of a white bearded old man; Christmas is very much out of order, it confuses the relentless ticking away of time, and that's because Christmas is not an event it is a process, a process described in the prophetic stories of Samuel, and retold in the nativity narratives of Matthew and Luke.

Today's gospel concludes with: "*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.*"

The placing of this particular text just after the divine birth is cleverly out of time, for it is about orientation; in verse 49 Jesus responds to the question "*Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.*"

And his response, which are the first words Jesus speaks, give voice to a new orientation; "*Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*"

No longer the 'son of Joseph', Jesus speaks of a more fundamental relationship, naming and revealing the true nature for all humanity.

In the process of Christmas;

God gave God-self into the manger of humanity

How was this accomplished?

In the figure of Hannah, the gift is of her fullness into the service of the temple

And in the figure of Mary that the gift is realised in bearing God into reality

In both cases it is not the action of the God,

but rather **our** divine action that is creative of life and of love..

The final words of today's gospel are enough for us to remember: "*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.*"

As we continue to unwrap Christmas for ourselves, we are reminded today not to watch the clock, but rather to place wisdom before years, and divine favour before human favour.. for the orientation of life is toward 'increase' rather than decrease.

