

After two years of pandemic lockdowns at Christmas, we were so looking forward to gathering for three in-person Christmas Eve services last night. Everything was ready; the choir was rehearsed, the orders of service printed, and the church was decorated. But something called a three day snow cyclone, which closed county roads and exposed us to 80km wind gusts and white out blizzard conditions prevented us from gathering together safely. Who knew?

But as the psalm appointed for Christmas Day says, we still sing our song, we offer our praise, and we declare the wonders of God's work. And the wonder of God's work is that even in the bleak mid-winter; even when frosty wind made moan, and earth stood hard as iron, and water like a stone, the eternal and almighty God came down from heaven and entered into human flesh. God entered



into our most fragile condition, with all of its chaos and uncertainty, and of all places was born in a stable in the outback of a foreign empire which ruled over an oppressed people called Israel. It is a very concrete event.

As we say in the creed, the *only begotten* Son, the one *begotten* of the Father before all worlds, the one *begotten* not made; the light of light, came down from heaven and was made human. It is a very specific event.

When the shepherds went with haste to see this thing that had taken place, they found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger, just as the angels had described. Particularly, they found the sign: a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

When they saw this sign, Luke describes that they didn't hang around. They barely took time to congratulate the parents, or make an offer to help. Instead these nomadic rural farmers left to go and tell others. They left to make known what had been told them about this child. And Luke describes that all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

“For unto you is born this day is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

The rest of the gospel narrative is an unfolding of what this Saviour, this Messiah, born in the city of David means. As the creed says, it is “*for us and for our salvation.*”

This is an event of great joy for *all* people. The promises first made to Abraham and Jacob, Moses and David and given for a specific people called Israel are now expanded for *all* people. And that promise is simply this: you belong to me. You are mine.

Even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I am with you and you are mine.

Even though you live in an oppressed land, I am with you and you are mine.

Even though you are alienated because you are a leper, or a paralytic, or because you were born blind; even though you are a tax collector or a sinner; even though you are a Samaritan at the well with no water; even though you are hosting a wedding and run out of wine; even though you

are in the wilderness with no food; even though you are a criminal hanging on a cross; and even though you desert me, deny me, doubt me, or betray me; *you are mine*, and today you will be with me in Paradise.

This is the promise of a Saviour for *all* people. How much more comprehensive can the gospels be that this is good news for all.

Our task, and it is a challenging one that we are needing to relearn, is how, like the shepherds, we hear, we see, then we go to make known to others what has been told to us about this child.

Because this is good news of great joy for all people. As the psalm says, we declare his honour among all nations, and his wonders among all peoples.

So let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad, for God has visited and redeemed his people.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.

Thanks be to God.