

Knox Uniting Church

Thursday December 25th 2024 Christmas Day at Boronia Road Uniting Church

Sermon by Russell Croxford

Bible passages: Luke 2:8-20

'A very real Christmas'

[video clip: "The Boy" <https://vimeo.com/55020406>]

I love the realness of that video clip – called, appropriately, 'A Real Christmas'. A young couple, hitch-hiking at night on a lonely road. She is heavily pregnant and struggling. A rough looking truck driver picks them up. They pull over at a truck stop. The couple head into the public restrooms, where their baby is born. But they are overjoyed, and everyone at the truck stop shares the joy. It's very realistic, very earthy, very relatable.

It highlights the earthiness and the ordinariness of the first Christmas. There must have been quite a lot of unpleasant-ness in the long journey to Bethlehem and in the very rough conditions of the birth. But that unpleasant-ness was mixed with great joy.

The ordinariness of the first Christmas makes it very human. And because it's very human, it is very personal. It's about you, and it's about me.

Have you ever been personally picked out of a crowd? You're at a big event, lost in a vast crowd, when, out of the blue, someone on the stage looks your way and sees you and points at you saying, "Hey there, you in the blue shirt, I need you to help me up here". "What! Who? Me? Why me?" It's a bit of a shock.

It can be rather surprising to discover that the God of the universe and of six billion other people, is looking at me, personally, in my ordinariness, and says "Hey you". He knows *my* name. He calls *me*. By entering the human existence as a baby in Bethlehem, that's what he's done. He's made it personal.

When we look again, today, at what Luke wrote about the birth of Jesus, we see several examples of ordinariness - of realness.

Mary and Joseph were ordinary people (even though we've made them into saints) who struggled into Bethlehem that night, couldn't find any lodging, even though Mary was going into labour. They found some cloths; they found a manger – just a dirty animal feeding trough. It was very basic – *less* than basic. Nothing special at all. Yet God picked them in their ordinariness.

And then we have the shepherds. They were rough guys. Forget the nice pictures on Christmas cards. They probably looked a bit like that truck driver in the video – a bit untrustworthy, maybe a bit dangerous-looking. Shepherds were, therefore, a marginalized group, not well respected, very basic and ordinary. Yet God picked them out to be the first people to hear the good news. The angel said to them, "A saviour has been born to you". That's to *you* guys, to *you* ordinary Shepherds, who no one else cares about. God says "Hey you" to the Shepherds.

We should also remember that the first Christmas took place in a less-than-ideal social setting. There was political unrest, division in the land and harsh economic conditions. Sound familiar? If Jesus was born today, it wouldn't be much different. That's the ordinariness of today's story. That makes it very relatable to us today.

But this ordinariness is, of course, mixed with extra-ordinariness. There is the unexplainable, the mysterious, the miraculous. Visits by angels. A child mysteriously conceived. An unusual star in the sky. A promise that this ordinary baby will save the world. There is something very unusual alongside the usual.

And that's what we see in the gospel stories in the way Jesus lived and died. He was an ordinary human who got hungry, tired, happy and angry. And, he must have looked just like any other Jewish young man. (except for that time on the hill when his appearance changed – Lk 9:28f) But at the same time the divine within him came out in his teaching, his miracles, his infinite love of people. Human *and* divine.

That's the Christ-child, born as a Saviour to you and me, was ordinary *and* divine.

And here's the main thing. As ordinary human beings, created in the image of God, we also have 'the divine' within us. No that doesn't give us some visible aura around us or a halo. It does mean that placing our faith in this Christ-child will bring about an inner-transformation – like a light within - an inner light that gives us joy, as it did for the Shepherds that night who were filled with joy.

And that means we can be a light in a dark world too. We can bring hope to others. We can say things and do things – mostly just simple, ordinary things, that bring transformation to others. Our 'ordinary' can be 'extraordinary'.

So, Christmas is about God making himself real – up close and personal, for you and me. That's the gift we have.

Prayer

God of new beginnings, we need this new beginning.
We need new hope for ourselves and our dark world.

We need this story of a baby wrapped in cloth, lying in a manger.
We need this story of the angels and the shepherds.
We need Mary's song and Joseph's faith.
We need to remember how to begin again.
So, with hope in our hearts, we turn to you.
Help us this day, near the end of another year, to renew our faith.
Instil in us the truth that love knows our name.
Remind us that we are not too far, or too lost, or too distracted to lose your love.
Remind us that no matter where we go or what we do, you took on flesh for each of us.
If we feel we are too far from your love, help us to feel your presence all around.

Creator God, may this good news of Jesus' birth be the foundation of our beginning.
Wipe away any false belief, and centre us in the good news this day proclaims.
All are known. All are loved. A saviour has been born! AMEN