

Knox Uniting Church Cluster.

Sunday December 28th 2025 – (RCL: Year A. First day of Christmas)

Sermon (reflection) by Russell Croxford at Ferntree Gully Uniting Service

Bible passages: Matthew 2:13-23 and Hebrews 2:10-18 (NRSVUE)

“Thank God you’re here”

Every Christmas we sing, “Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright”. Calm and bright? Really? Is that what Bethlehem was really like the night Jesus was born? Is that the world Jesus was born into? Not likely at all. The truth is that the world he came into was far from ‘calm and bright’.

Joan Taylor, professor of Christian history, in an article called ‘What world was Jesus born into?’ (*The Conversation* 23/12/2025) says that the peaceful Christmas scenes we see on most Christmas cards tell entirely the wrong story. She writes about that first Christmas saying: ‘The gospel stories tell of dislocation and danger’.

For example, in reference to today’s gospel reading about the brutal actions of King Herod, Taylor mentions that there are numerous other horrible stories about Herod that never made it into the bible – stories of his reign of terror, which can be found in other historical sources. To make things worse, Herod had the backing and blessing of Rome - the Romans being the brutal colonisers of the land Jesus was born into and grew up in. Rome showed no mercy to anyone who even hinted at resisting the empire. On one occasion they massacred the whole town of Sepphora in the north because of some dissenters gathering there. And that was very close to Nazareth where Jesus grew up. There was nothing peaceful about life in Jesus’ time. As Taylor writes, ‘Jesus was embedded in this chaotic, unstable, traumatic social world’.

It was because of these very present and real threats that Jesus’ family had to flee from Bethlehem to find refuge in Egypt. They escaped the massacre at Herod’s hand of all those infant boys. We can’t begin to imagine the horror of those who didn’t escape. No wonder the weeping was endless. What a world for the Son of God to come into!

I’d like you to take a close look at this photo. (from *Freepik* photos)



What’s do you think is happening in this picture? Are these people escaping something? Are they in the middle of something bad? Or, heading into something bad? Are they homeless? Are they refugees? Are they going somewhere hopeful, peaceful...or terrible? It could be a picture of Jesus the refugee on the move to Egypt. Or it could be a picture of refugees today, living in a world of horror.

As we know only too well, our world today is not much different to the world Jesus was born into, in so many ways. People are born into oppression. Some are trying to escape oppression and war. We just have to think of Gaza today. ‘Herods’ are still alive and well. Political tyrants still hold power, and that power is being used in all the corrupt and evil ways imaginable.

As we approach the end of the year, we will again see in our newspapers those full page 'collages' of events – famous or infamous, good and evil, the best and the worst, that have happened in the last 12 months. These are a reminder that our world is still broken, in spite of much good that still thankfully exists. It's all very mixed up. The good is there but the evil seems endless. The Bondi Massacre stands as the supreme example of this in 2025.

So where is the hope?

Our reading from Hebrews gives us hope today – hope in the person of Jesus, because of the way he enters into our human plight. He enters into our struggles and pain. He cries with us. He hurts with us. He shares every bit of the journey.

In verse 11 it says, 'For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters'. From his perspective he is right down at our level our own brother. Then in verse 14, we have, 'Since, therefore, the children [that's us] share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things'. Every aspect of our humanity becomes his humanity. He is sharing everything with us. And finally in verse 18, 'Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested'. Jesus knew the testing of suffering in this world. He knows suffering first hand and therefore knows what we are going through. His presence in our suffering might not take away the suffering, but it gives reassurance, comfort, and hope.

You probably would agree with me when I say that, wherever God is, that place is holy. Right? So when we think of our messed up our world is, and the fact that God promises to be right there in the mess with us, then I suppose we can say the messy places actually become holy places! It's certainly not that God makes the mess, we do that to ourselves, but he makes the mess holy! And those of us of faith have discovered that God doesn't simply swoop in and magically clean up the mess. He just occupies it. And in doing that he gives birth to hope, in the middle of the mess.

Going back to Joan Taylor's article. In talking about Jesus' arrival into humanity she writes: 'The real nativity is indeed not a simple one of peace and joy but rather, one of struggle – *and yet mystifying hope*'.

Mystifying hope. I really like that. It is mystifying. It is mysterious. It's hard to get our minds around the whole idea of hope in a hard world. But that mystifying hope came to us in the incarnation of God into all humanity and all things.

But as God enters the mess and creates hope, it invites us to enter the mess and be creators of hope as well.

Just as we say 'thank God you're here' about Jesus coming into our messy existence, we can be someone about whom others say, 'Thank God you're here'

As one year ends and another is about to start, we look back at the mess, and to be honest, we look ahead at more mess to come, most probably. But we need to look ahead with this mystifying hope - and that makes all the difference.