

ADVENT 3 – JOY WILL FIND A WAY

Eternal God,
in the long ago days when the earth was flat,
and heaven was above the clouds,
and disease was caused by demons,

We now, after the enlightenment
are in bondage to different limitations.

We doubt what we cannot prove;
we ignore what we cannot see
and finding little room for faith,

Yet we believe your Son was born to lighten ALL our darknesses.

The good folk of the Iona Community and the Wild Goose Resource Group who wrote this prayer are so kind in the words they use to honour the elders of our Christian past - when the world was understood to be flat, heaven was above the clouds and disease was caused by demons.

That was their truth.

Our Christian elders and many still, also believed virgin births as a sign something wonderful was occurring between God and humanity.

In 2024 we have well and truly dissected and for many discarded the miracle of the virgin birth...

BUT it is said “don’t let the truth get in the way of a good story’

Scientific truths are the indisputable foundation for truth.

Ancient stories rich in myth, symbol, poetry and metaphor are indisputable foundations for the truth of the human condition.

For those of us fascinated by humanity’s epic histories through the empires of Egypt, Greece and Rome, India – the gods have always been ‘coming down to earth’ in some capacity or other but usually to keep a wealthy ruling powerful dynasty going.

Christianity's foundation story of the incarnation – God becoming human flesh, born of an ordinary non powerful insignificant young woman - Mary births a new way of understanding the God of the Hebrews.

God is getting messy and unclean by defying the old religions categorising humans as *clean or unclean*. This is a joyful and liberating moment in time for the world of faith.

It is good angels like Gabriel who give the message to Mary

Good angels – in Greek = *ev-angelo*.... Oooo evangelise....

Ev = good and *Angel* = message or welcome news....

So our word '*evangelise*' is the good welcome news

Evangelism has become a dirty word amongst some Christians for the terrible things done in the name of evangelism.

I think it is time to rehabilitate and learn to relove the word 'evangelism'!

At *evangelism's* heart the good message is that God is with and amongst us God is for us and breaks down the laws of exclusion, segregation, who is in and who is out this is joyful and liberating news....

But this may not have been a great news day for Mary though, with the impact of shame and exclusion that may come her way being mysteriously pregnant while betrothed to Joseph.

Yet this is a real human story and we believe God is with this young couple.

And as like Canterbury Tales or any good story - there's meaning making parts to the story like:

a challenging birthing context, the warmth of animals when humans fail us, wise leaders from another religion, the astronomical marvel of bright stars in the night skies.

But what does Mary do when confronted with the news that would soon make her one of the most painted, sculpted, revered women throughout history – Continuing in Luke's story, Mary sings a song of joy and a song of liberation.

We don't often put together '*joy and liberation*' but they are entwined.

The story of God getting messy with humanity, with a birth of a baby amongst the warm bodies of animals and unexpected visitors, continues in our times.

We continually need the good news of baby Jesus, son of God, a threat to the rulers of the day, God's message from this little prince of peace, is to BE the peace... BE the hope.... LOVE the unclean like Mary, BE people of faith filled JOY!

As our world continues to get itself enmeshed with unholy powers and dark empires, some we can't even see like the dark web, we need the good news of Jesus more than ever.....

Yet how can the people of Gaza find joy and liberation? How can the desperately homeless find joy and liberation? How can we who are suffering great sadnesses and the passing of our darling ones find joy? When life is unfair and cruel where is this God of joy? This is an eternal question where answers typically feel glib.

Maybe Zephania of old who sang a song of joy in hard times may have words of encouragement for us.

Maybe Mary who sings a song of joy and liberation after her life changing news has encouragement for us.

Maybe song and music is a way to moments of joy.

Music undoubtedly is spiritual and incarnates within us our emotions, our faith and our spirituality.

A solo voice or singing in harmony with different parts can lift us to the realm of angels where *the rumour of God with us* may be true.

Slide:

With the abhorrence of the British European and American industrialised slave trade in humans, which still continues today... African slaves who were brutalised beyond our imaginings somehow, somehow found faith in God, and sang and sang and sang and still sing in harmony, singing the blues, singing

spirituals, singing jazz and singing in unbelievable church choirs, as black America continues to fight for God's reign of equality and inclusion.

Slide:

Ukrainian Orthodox folk sing Christmas carols to keep their hopes up in their endless war, maybe also Russian orthodox people sing and sing and sing for the war to end too.

Slide:

Indigenous Australia has enriched all Australians lives through music, song and dance expressing deep distress and joy and the longed for hope of liberation from colonisation.

Recently on a wet day in Melbourne Archie Roach and Ruby Roach are reunited here in Fitzroy with these beautiful sculptures. Archie and Ruby Roach are true angels of hope, love, joy, peace and liberation as they sing truthful stories of our past and calling Australians to God's ways of reconciliation.

Recently at MUC, I experienced true joy with God being with us, the incarnation. 2 Sundays ago before services I heard the sounds of angels as the Fellowship@10 choir rehearsed in a community space while concurrently the Family@10 band rehearsed in the auditorium.

Earth and heaven met as words, music and voices of praise harmonised lifting the spirits of all who passed through our centre.

Different generations – boomers and Gen Ys singing in different rooms, singing different songs for the same hopes for joy and liberation for all humanity through the power of Jesus – flesh like us, God with us a miracle of hope and love.

I'd like to finish sharing the truth about the joy and liberation singing brings, with a true story.

This story I believe is a parable for us Christians and our Manningham Uniting church community - with our different services, our different songs yet our one Body harmonising in the Name of Christ.

This true story and parable from 1977 is about Bing Crosby and David Bowie.

Peace on Earth/Little Drummer Boy David Bowie and Bing Crosby

In 1977, David Bowie joined Bing Crosby in London's Elstree Studios to film a duet for one of the crooner's trademark Christmas specials, *Bing Crosby's Merrie Olde Christmas*.

It was the most unliking pairing that anyone could have dreamed up! Singing a medley of **Peace On Earth/Little Drummer Boy**, however, these 2 singers created a seasonal classic that lives on as one of the best Christmas songs of all time.

Bowie was in the middle of his "Berlin era" when he agreed to be a guest on *Bing Crosby's Merrie Olde Christmas*. His album *Heroes*, was due in October and Bowie was fully committed to promoting the album.

When the TV producers extended an invitation for Bowie to be a part of Crosby's show, it gave him an opportunity to reach a whole new mainstream audience in the US so good exposure for the 'Heroes Album'.

Bowie also had a more personal reason for agreeing to appear, telling the producers, "I'm doing the show because my mother loves Bing Crosby."

The story line behind the 1977 special *Bing Crosby's Merrie Olde Christmas*, had the singer receiving a letter from a distant relative, the fictional Sir Percival Crosby, inviting Crosby to spend the holidays with him in his mansion in England.

With shooting scheduled to start at 10am on 11 September 1977, Bowie arrived on the elaborate set but things did not start well.

“We had decided that we wanted them to do a duet of Little Drummer Boy,” recalled Larry Grossman and Ian Fraser the musical supervisors. “And when we told Bowie about the number, he said, ‘I won’t sing that song!’”

” Asked why he wouldn’t sing that song, Bowie’s response was unreserved: “My son likes the Little Drummer Boy, but I hate that song!”

With the backing track having already been recorded Grossman, Fraser and the show’s scriptwriter, Buz Kohan, were limited in what they could do.

Holing up in a basement room at Elstree Studios, they raced to come up with a solution. “We decided the best way to salvage the arrangement was to do a countermelody that would fit in between the spaces and maybe write a new bridge, and see if we can sell him that,” Kohan said.

With time pressures bearing down on them, the trio penned the lyrics and vocal line for a song they titled *Peace On Earth*.

Within an hour the song writers presented ‘Peace on Earth’ to David Bowie.

Within another hour, Bowie and Crosby had worked out their parts for what was now the Peace On Earth/Little Drummer Boy medley.

“They sat at the piano and David was a little nervous,” but as Mary Crosby told *Billboard* in 2014.

“Dad realised David was this amazing musician, and David realised Dad was an amazing musician.”

“You could see them both collectively relax and then magic was made.”...