

PRAYERS AND BIBLE REFLECTION, CHRISTMAS DAY 2020

No 41

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1 **Being ready for worship**

Welcome to Christmas Day. May this day be a time of blessing for you, your family, and all with whom you share the day. Christmas is nothing without worship. We are often enjoined to remember “the reason for the season”, and it is so true. A secular Christmas, with schmaltzy platitudes about “the true meaning of Christmas” is empty and devoid of anything more satisfying than a good meal. So begin today on the right foot, by acknowledging that Christmas celebrates the mightiest miracle of all time, the coming into the world of the creator God himself.

2 **Prayer of Adoration**

Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Saviour,
we greet you on this day, and rejoice that you are with us.
We worship you, and adore you, and welcome you.
For you are the very Word of God;
you were before the beginning, and shall be beyond the end of time,
yet you came into your creation,
took on human form,
adopted the vulnerability of a newborn child,
and lived as one of us.
Jesus Christ, on this day, of all days, we praise you with rejoicing,
for in that vulnerable child is the source of life and grace and forgiveness.
In the tiny baby in the cattle stall is the salvation of humankind.

3 **Prayer of Confession**

We confess before you that we are unworthy of the gift that came this day.
We are lost in our sinfulness,
obsessed with ourselves and the worlds we have constructed for ourselves.
We habitually sin in thought, word and deed,
and by our many acts of omission.
The innocence of the newborn child
reminds us of just how inured we are in our sinful ways,
and we come before you in shame to seek your forgiveness and grace.
For the tiny child is also the Risen One,
the saviour who died that we might live,
and so we come in his name.
Amen

4 **Assurance of Forgiveness**

God so loved the world
that he sent his only son as an innocent child,
as a newborn babe.
God did not send his son into the world to judge the world as it deserved;
the child came to save the world,
for the child is the gift of God’s inexplicable and unquenchable love.
In Jesus Christ, the innocent newborn,
in Jesus Christ, the victorious risen one,
our sins are forgiven.

5 **Selected Lectionary Reading**

John 1:1-14

The other Lectionary Readings

Isaiah 52:7-10

Psalm 98

Hebrews 1:1-12

6 **Bible Reflection –**

See below

7 **Prayers for the world and Lord’s Prayer**

God our Father,

As we joyfully greet Christmas Day,

we are confronted by all those whom this day finds in need.

For so many of them, this day is no different from any other day;

it is just the usual time of poverty, deprivation, fear, hardship and suffering.

So we pray for all those in our own nation

who are in need, or in unhappy circumstances, on this day.

We pray for those whose commitment to serving others

precludes them from their own families’ celebrations today.

We pray for those Australians who have been unable to return home

or to travel interstate

because of the circumstances of the pandemic that has gripped the world

and has resurged here in our city of Sydney.

And we pray for those in other nations who also have no reason to celebrate –

for those in the grip of war and conflict,

for the growing number afflicted by famine,

for those caught in the throes of Covid-19 or other illnesses,

for those whose life has succumbed to the deprivation of poverty.

On this day, Father, may they come to know

that it was not for the sake of the affluent and comfortable

that the newborn Christ child came,

but to bring good news to the poor and the oppressed and the hopeless.

May our celebrations today

be humbled by an awareness of the great privileges we have,

and may our resolve for the new year be to share more and more of our privilege

with those who are so dear to the Saviour’s heart.

We conclude our prayer with the prayer that Jesus taught us to say:
Our father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come;
Your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil,
for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever.
Amen

8 **Conclusion**

We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.
May this great truth of Christmas remain with you throughout this day,
and may the light that came into the world guide your path in the year to come.
For that is the blessing of Christmas which is upon you.
Amen.

BIBLE REFLECTION

What would it look like if God were to come amongst us?

Over the course of this year, for some weeks we were reading from Exodus. In Exodus, when God drew near to his people, the earth shook and the mountains rumbled, and the Israelites quivered in fear at the sound of his mighty voice.

Then during Advent, we read from the prophet Isaiah. In one passage, we found the Jews crying out for just such mighty acts, to assure them of God's presence with them. Yet God had always been with them, unrecognised and unacknowledged. God had been eager for their call, but the call had never come.

So what do *we* think the presence of God would look like? Do we think that God's coming would have to look like the most dramatic scene that a Hollywood special effects team could construct? And if we don't think that, what *do* we think?

In 1995, Joan Osborne release her debut album. It included a song penned by Eric Bazilian called *One of Us*. It was a runaway hit, and its words are as haunting, and as challenging, today, as they were twenty-five years ago.

*If God had a name what would it be?
And would you call it to his face?
If you were faced with Him in all His glory
what would you ask if you had just one question?
If God had a face what would it look like?*

*What if God was one of us?
Just a slob like one of us
just a stranger on the bus
trying to make his way home?*

Perhaps we're offended by the word "slob". God couldn't be a slob! But what *should* challenge us is the thought that God might be the person sitting next to us on the bus going home – maybe tired like us, maybe sweaty and a bit unkempt after a hard day's work. If we didn't know it was God, maybe we *would* secretly think of the person as a bit of a slob. Could that person really be God?

Our reading from John's Prologue could be given the title "Triumph and Tragedy". The triumphant part is the extraordinary recognition of God's mighty act of incarnation. The One who *was* in the beginning, through whom all things were made, the One who is the light shining in the darkness, in whom is life itself, became flesh and lived among us. The mighty One was in the world which he had created.

From the very beginning of John's gospel, the truth is revealed. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* Here is the triumphant truth of the Incarnation.

But beside it sits the *tragedy* of God's mighty act.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

Where do *we* look for God? Would we recognise God? Would we expect thunder and lightning and earthquakes to announce his being near? Do we cry out sometimes, "Where are you God? Why

don't you show yourself?" Would we actually recognise God if he *were* present? If he *were* the sweaty figure sharing our seat on the bus? What if God were to come to his own this very day? Would we have to say again, *the world did not know him*?

Perhaps we'd expect God to be nicely dressed, and join in our Christmas celebrations. Perhaps he'd join us as an honoured guest at our laden meal table. Perhaps he'd smile benignly as the family Christmas gifts were handed out.

But the message of Christmas is *not* that God came to his own to drape himself in tinsel and baubles, and to indulge in storybook sentimentalisms about the "true meaning of Christmas". There was nothing polite or genteel about the life of Jesus on this earth. Jesus enjoyed no privilege, no affluence, no security, no immunity from the hardships of the world. Indeed, quite the opposite. The world which failed to know its creator ganged up on him, beat him and spat on him and nailed him to a cross of shame, and left him to die.

The God who came into the world looked much more like our companion on the bus than the shining cloud of Exodus, or the polite visitor we might imagine joining our family Christmas. The message of Christmas is that the God who came into the world which he had made, whose love was so overwhelming that he reached into his creation with comfort and grace and forgiveness – the God of the Incarnation – descended into the human world in all its pain and suffering and squalor and fear. The God of Christmas will be present in the refugee camps, in the evacuation centres, in the detention centres, in the emergency hospitals, in the homeless shelters, in the poverty-stricken slums that are in too many places throughout the world. The God of Christmas will know the hunger pangs of famine, the pain of suffering, and the depth of despair that comes when all hope has departed. The God of Christmas will have his sleeves rolled up and will be sweaty and dirty and unkempt. There is nothing seemly about the God of Christmas who comes to his own.

Yet this is the God who is the light that shines in the darkness, which the darkness can never overcome. And on this day, if we open our eyes to see the presence of God in his world, we will be able to say, *We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

Amen