



It is so good to be with you this evening as we celebrate Jesus' birthday.

I was thinking as I was preparing this message, it's not always a good idea when I am thinking !! And I thought, we rarely go back to our actual birth when we celebrate our birthday, we celebrate our age usually, but then I guess we are not the Messiah !!

Because the birth of Jesus was so significant, we need to remember and reflect on every detail, as every detail has special meaning for us all.

However, I do like to remember that it is also Jesus' birthday. He did grow up and become a man, our Redeemer, Saviour, teacher and Lord of all; and most importantly, our friend as we navigate our Christian journey on this earth and beyond.

I have also enjoyed the Advent journey as well, as we have prepared for this Christmas Day and the good tidings it brings.

I found the lighting of the Advent candles significant as I noted the gifts that Jesus birth brings to us, are found in these candles, hope, peace, love and joy.

Most of us here have experienced many, many Christmas Days. For me the Season of Christmas never loses it's awesomeness. There is something powerful and yet, also a humbleness about the birth of Jesus. Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem to participate in the universal census as decreed by Caesar Augustus, no one was exempt. The census means that Jesus will be born where Israel's Messiah should be born; in David's city, Bethlehem. However as it turns out, there is no accommodation for them so Jesus is born outside the town.

Jesus' birth takes place on the margins, beginning a pattern to be seen over and over again in his life and ministry. Jesus was often on the margins of society because of his different way of thinking regarding forgiveness, love and care for the poor and needy, the outcasts of society.

He came to minister to these suffering people and to introduce us to social justice, so that we, his people, will carry on his work.

This precious gift from God, who could not find hospitality in his own city, will institute in the world the hospitality of God. The poor and marginalised shepherds of Bethlehem will be the first to experience it.

Jesus lived a very simple life. His focus being prayerful contact with God the Father in order to ensure He was following God's will, to seek His guidance, strength and support as the Word was spread, and this theme will continue throughout Jesus' ministry.

Jesus also came to turn the world upside down and to encourage the people who had turned away from God, to repair the rift, as we so often hear in the Old Testament.

Jesus didn't begin his ministry until he was thirty. He spent His childhood in Nazareth and was therefore known as Jesus of Nazareth. He was a carpenter and no sermons or miracles were performed before He was baptised by John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan river.

The birth of Jesus is a very short story in Luke's Gospel and moves quickly to the shepherds who are keeping watch over their flocks by night.

*"Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the Glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified,"*

so would we have been I'm sure! But the Angel said to them,

*"Do not be afraid; for see I am bringing you good news of great Joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you; you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of heavenly hosts. Praising God and saying "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"*

When the angels and the heavenly hosts had left them and gone to heaven, the shepherds decided to go to Bethlehem and see this thing that had taken place. I seem to remember a whole lot of "songs were written about this mysterious birth in a stable. I'm sure we will continue to sing them for generations to come. This baby Jesus certainly made an impact on this earth.

So the shepherds went with great haste to see the baby Jesus and made it known, and all who heard it were amazed.

The Gospel reading finishes with,

*"But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart."*

I often think about Mary, she was only a child herself, probably fifteen years old. What a devoted and trusting young person she was, sounding wise beyond her years, loved, trusted, and chosen by God to deliver baby Jesus, the Messiah, King and Lord of all.

Today we delight in the birth of this very special baby. However, we must remember that the baby grew up and so we come to understand the full impact of this child on humanity. We see glimpses of Jesus childhood in the scriptures. Even then he is no ordinary child growing up in Nazareth, we see His divinity as well as His humanness.

As Jesus public ministry begins we see the wonder of God's amazing gift to us unfold.

This Christmas season let us embrace the true meaning of Christmas.

I sometimes find it difficult to celebrate when so many people through the world are suffering so much through wars, oppression, violence and extreme weather patterns. We also need to remember those for whom Christmas will not be a happy or joyful experience as they remember the loss of loved ones, family estrangement's, or families separated by distance and also those with mental health issues; the empty chair at the table !

However this is indeed a time for great celebration as Jesus comes to bring hope, peace, love and joy to our broken world. It is only through Jesus that we can overcome the troubles of our society and ease the pain and suffering that many people endure.

We pray that Jesus will draw us to Himself at this special time, speaking to us messages of hope, peace, love and joy. As we dwell with our Lord, we will learn how we as individuals can bring his kingdom closer to our own families and friends, our local communities, nationally and world wide. Keep praying.

I wish you all a wonderful Christmas with your families and friends, may you find hope, peace, love and joy around your Christmas table and become a shining example of what Jesus has brought to our world. We thank you God for this amazing gift, in Christ our Lord. Come Jesus, come. Amen.