

**SERMON FOR CHRIST MASS  
All SAINTS BIRKENHEAD 2017**

I wonder if you have ever been to Israel? I myself have never been. But I certainly have friends who have visited and loved there. When they recall their times there for some reason I find myself surprised to hear that weddings still happen in Cana, that fishermen still cast nets in the Sea of Galilee. Sometimes they speak of the war, the homelessness, the poverty, the injury both mental and physical, the racial and religious conflict.

And what, I ask myself, what has changed in 2000 years? Israel, it seems, is little different from the time of Jesus birth. For at that time the country was under political pressure from a foreign invader, people were influenced for good or ill by the government, there was war, poverty, homelessness, weddings, fishing, trading, and racial and religious conflict. Granted They probably didn't have Donald Trump stuffing it all up for them but In Israel, then and now, we have a focus of what is happening all

over the world in various ways and to various degrees.

N Z is not exempt. There may be no obvious war going on here. There is homelessness, poverty, racial and religious conflict, social ills we dare not face, and a Government which, for good or ill, has a big influence in the lives of our people.

2

We too are caught up in these so called world events. World events are our events, because they happen here in some way and also because our media brings them to our attention, it is the consequences of living in a globalized world.

Has nothing changed since the time of Jesus? Is the situation as dire and hopeless as it sounds? It is in such a world as ours that the first Christmas occurred. The message of Christmas came to people just like us, suffering the same things that all human beings undergo. The birth of a baby is a sign of

hope, a sign of promise, a longing for a new life which will give us the courage to move into the future with confidence. That confidence comes because God is with us. All the trappings of the first Christmas, the strange events the stories relate, remind us of the hope we can have right in the midst of what seems a hopeless situation. The safe delivery of their child was a sign of hope for Mary and Joseph. The visits of the shepherds, and Wise Men with their gifts, was a sign of hope, a foretaste of the future in store for this child. The dreams of Joseph and Mary, the angels and the visions, were all signs of hope that this event had meaning not only for the participants, but also for those beyond.

3

The way we celebrate Christmas is also about giving us hope in a world where that seems in short supply. For us the parties, the presents, cards, sharing food and drink with family and friends are our signs of hope. We see in our own celebration the fact that the most important thing in life is the love that exists between people. Where we can see, express, and

experience this love, then we know there is hope for our world.

But there is more to this story than the birth of a baby. It really isn't just a birth story at all. So much of the meaning of our celebration depends on who we believe this child to be. Today we are reminded that Jesus is in fact the person in whom God is revealed to us. So the most amazing thing about Christmas is that "the Word became flesh and lived among us." Jesus is "the light who shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." All the strange things contained in these birth stories are pointing us to the beyond. They are telling us that this child is no ordinary child. Our true hope lies in the fact that this baby is none other than God. So whatever life throws at us, whatever happens in our society, whatever happens in the world, Christmas bursts in on us and tells us there is hope.

4

This doesn't do away with our sadness, or our fear, or our horror at what happens in our world. It does

mean we can do something to help life continue with new purpose and new vision.

I saw a programme on TV a while ago about a family in poverty and sickness. A city mission went to help them with gifts and food to celebrate Christmas. The response from this family was that their ability to carry on came from knowing they were not alone. There were others who sent messages of support and encouragement to them. There were others who cared enough to give. It's about making contact, about being with others in their trouble. That's what we do at Christmas, be with others. It's what God did in the person of Jesus, to be with us. And we know God continues to come and desires to be born in us.

5

To truly celebrate Christmas is to live with hope, love joy and peace where these things seem in short supply. We are to be the people in whom God is born again. We continue to bring to the world the same qualities that Jesus brought to a world which in some ways wasn't a lot different from ours.

This Christmas may you know God with you, and give thanks for that awesome gift. Here in this worship we give thanks to God. And God gives a gift to us. God gives his very self in bread and wine. So the birth of Jesus takes place here, as we come to adore him.