

Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Christmas 2019

The time came

What a time for a baby to come!

Here they are on the road, in an unfamiliar town and the time came.

The time came for God to do the unexpected, to change our sense of time forever. The God of endless time who was and is to come enters into a particular time and a particular place.

The mystery is that eternity and finite time now meet as Mary delivers her child.

It is said time waits for no man or woman.

Time just happens, we have no control over it. It seems to speed up the older I get whereas as a child it seemed to stretch out forever.

In hard times time seems to drag, in good times it seems to rollick along.

Here tonight, amidst the busyness of these days when you can't quite believe it's Christmas, we reach a time when we can pause just for a moment, as we remember Jesus being born.

The time long ago when God became flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone is new again as we rejoice in the birth of this little one, Jesus.

The almighty, all powerful one who is Lord of time takes the risk to share our limited time, to enter life as a vulnerable newborn in an ordinary family in a tiny town at the edge of things.

God enters as a vulnerable newborn and grow with us and for us to bring new light and hope into the world.

Here is God's love found with fingers and toes, in a living breathing human being.

Here is one who turns our world upside down to remind us that in our time love, peace, hope and joy are here.

Endless peace has its beginnings now, with the promise of more to come.

The timeless message of love and peace meets us here and now in our time wherever we are in whatever situation we find ourselves.

The story of God found as a baby reminds us that God is real and that love and hope can be found within each moment, each day, every year of our lives.

Each time we gather to celebrate Christmas we are in a different time in our lives, but whatever situation we are in, whatever stage of life, the good news is that God meets us and is with us.

God is with us in love and will continue to be with us and for us wherever we are, present to bring light in darkness and hope in the midst of fear.

God meets us in ordinary life, even when we feel on the edge of things.

It is the message that the star-struck shepherds first heard that is also for us: Good news for *all* people.

God is with us, loving us wherever we are, in happiness, or sadness, for the comfortable and uncomfortable, for the tired and perplexed, for the happy and the excited, for young ones and old, for all people and at all times.

God is born in us, within each of us always and connects us to each other.

This sign was not just for the motley crew of shepherds, or even for angels, or Mary and Joseph and those who first heard it, but is a message for all of us at all times.

Our time is met with their time and this message is as true today as it was then.

In a time long ago God came to be with us in flesh, to share the vulnerability of all that this means, to bring us new life from within.

In time, right now God continues to be with us, closer than breathing. The grace of God has appeared to give us glimpses of light of joy of hope and of love even to those in the deepest darkness.

It is ironic that Christmas time for all its joy and hope can be a difficult time for people, those who long for healing, who suffer, who have yet to glimpse the light that can be there ahead.

Yet God is always a God who is with us and for us and encourages us to be with and for others.

We are certainly seeing how we can respond in the response of firefighters and the surrounding community who give hope to those enduring much at this time.

At times each of us can catch a glimpse of how God is with us. A firefighter reflected on the fight for Balmoral town and could say Praise the Lord. He said I'm not a religious person but the Lord looked after us.

May we trust that love and treasure it and rejoice in it.

May we share with others in whatever time they are in, knowing that God who is born within us can help us share love with others.

Jesus you are the glory of eternity shining amongst us, the tenderness of God here with us now.

*Jesus, you are the champion of the weak,
The counsellor of the despairing,
The brother of us all who knows our needs.*

*Jesus you are the splendour of the Father,
the Son of Mary,
Our bridge between earth and the world beyond. Amen.*

Merry Christmas!

*Lectio:
Isaiah*