

# St. Margaret's Uniting Church

## Mooroolbark

**Sunday December 25th, 2016 - Christmas Day**

READING Luke 2:1-20

### REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

You can't chase divine mystery. You need to allow it to come to you.

Mary knew it. Joseph discovered it. It was true for shepherds and wise men.

Mystery of this form is like a butterfly. It doesn't work to chase one. If you want a butterfly to rest on you, you need to be still until it chooses you. You can't chase divine mystery. But you can be open to it.

I wonder what might have happened differently if Mary had not been open to the angel's message? I wonder how the story would have played out if Joseph discreetly divorced his bride? I wonder why mystery chose shepherds and wise men rather than a king like Herod?

In part I'm sure it is because they stopped to listen and dared to believe. The shepherds had work to do and they could just as well have stayed put. What folly the invitation to pay homage to a new born king anyhow. And the wise men bathed long enough in mystery to leave their contemplations for a brighter vision that beamed afar.

How are we open to divine mystery this day of days? How does love break into our lives and change us forever? How so in this year of war and rumours of war? How so when the world renders evil for evil and afflicts the faint hearted despite all they have gone through already?

Sometimes it is hard to be optimistic in the face of what seems a deep darkness. Which is good reason to tell again the story of God with us. At the heart of this story is a baby. In other words the story of God with us begins as an utter absence of power. God is naked, poor, new born and

a refugee. The child of God is born to a woman who dares open herself up to the mystery of God's love. The birth of Jesus is revealed to those usually overlooked – shepherds who were social outcasts who worked at night, stayed out of town, and did work no one else wanted.

This mystery bypasses the usual powers, even priests full of doctrine and church law. It sneaks under the nose of those who fight for status, money and power. It does not play the game of politics, religion or empire.

Rather divine mystery comes to us as good news despite all we see around us. In fact the proclamation is *good news of great joy for all the people*.

But not all the people get it. Which is why we need to stop chasing the butterfly and allow mystery to rest upon us.

To do that we tell a story. It is a story of a gregarious kid who was outspoken in the temple and who taught in parables. He treated women with uncommon respect. He did the same for lepers and tax collectors. In fact, anyone who was outcast, anyone who was powerless, anyone who was considered unworthy - found life, value, and hope in him.

Our Moderator, Rev. Sharon Hollis, spoke of God being born into human lives and history of every context. A nativity that is next to the local bottle shop is just as much a story of God with us, as a nativity born in the outback. And surely this story finds a home in war torn Aleppo, and other places where darkness seems to have too much say.

God is with us. Dare we believe this divine mystery? Can we stop long enough to allow divine mystery to choose us, to give birth and break into our life, our world?

Mary responded to such mystery. She stopped still long enough for an angel visitation with news that would change the course of her life. She invited mystery into her life and then sang with joy, despite not knowing much about it or where it would lead.

So let us stop for long enough to allow mystery to choose and rest upon us. Love comes. Love lifts. Love transforms. How can you be open to such love? How does your deepest and truest self say 'yes' to the inbreaking love of God that will change you forever?

If that is too big a question, maybe we might think about putting Christ back into Christmas. It has been a hot topic this past week. Some responses to this question invite us to rest again and allow a deeper mystery to rest upon us.

One such response is one made by Tim Winton to a very enthusiastic bible-based born again Christian. Winton asked, 'why don't you give the book a rest, and let your life be your witness.'

Let your life be your witness.

Ahh, divine love. Isn't this why people could see in Jesus that God is with us? Jesus' life was his witness. So we stop again for a while to wonder: How is my life a witness to *good news of great joy for all the people?*

Father Jarrod McKenna has some ideas. Here are five steps towards putting Christ back into Christmas, and for the whole of our lives.

1. Share with the poor
2. Renounce war
3. Welcome refugees
4. Love neighbours & enemies
5. Live lives of enticing humble beauty.

Love comes to town. It comes as a mysterious invitation

- as light to protest the darkness
- as hope to protest fear
- as peace to protest war
- as joy to protest sorrow
- as love to protest hatred.

Let us stop awhile for divine mystery to have its way with us. To bring peace, hope, joy and love that transform us forever.