

# Sermon Notes

St Mark's Anglican Church  
South Hurstville

Advent 4

Preacher

23 December 2007

The Reverend Chris Albany

Rector

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Readings: Isaiah 7. 10-16; Psalm 80. 1-2, 8-19; Romans 1. 1-7; Matthew 1.18-25

## God is not ashamed

This Sermon is basically Archbishop Rowan Williams' Christmas message to the Anglican Communion which can be found at

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/2007/12/14/ACNS4353> . I have added my own introduction, and words in italics have also been added.

I love the story told by Bishop Howell Witt about when he visited one of the parishes in the Diocese of North West Australia shortly after he was made Bishop and stayed with the Rectory family. At breakfast the young son of the Rector asked him how he had got to be a Bishop. After going into an explanation of the election process Bishop Witt said he asked the boy, Why do you ask Johnny?" to which the lad replied, "Oh I heard Dad say before you arrived yesterday *I don't know how he got to be the Bishop!* so I thought I'd ask you for him."

Mind you I'm glad it wasn't my son – that would have been embarrassing. We've all had experiences of being embarrassed by another's behaviour or words. Fred Nile is a recent example with his comments about the proposed Islamic school at Camden. You can probably think of your own cringe moments when you wish the person would stop making such a fool of themselves especially if it is child/ parent/ spouse.

Rowan Williams in his Christmas message to the Anglican Communion says

"One of the strangest yet most moving expressions in the New Testament is a verse in the Letter to the Hebrews (11.16): God 'is not ashamed to be called their God'. The writer is talking about the history of God's people. When they have been faithful to God, faithful in keeping on moving onwards in faith rather than settling down in self-satisfaction, when they are true pilgrims, then God is content to be known as their God. He declares himself to be the God of pilgrims, of people who know that their lives are incomplete and that they are still journeying towards the fullness of God's promises. Visiting refugee camps in the Middle East, as I did this October, brings home so powerfully what it is to be literally and absolutely homeless, not able to be confident in any resources, inner or outer. People in these terrible circumstances will never be complacent, they will always be looking for a future. They are in the most obvious way those whom God is not ashamed to be with, people whose God he is happy to be. He is at home with the homeless. But it is also an image of God's relationship with all those who are homeless or wandering in other ways.

"What an odd expression, to say that God is not 'ashamed'! It's as though we are being reassured that God, in spite of everything, doesn't mind being seen in our company. Most of us know the experience of being embarrassed by someone we are with – children are embarrassed by parents, parents by children;" (*In today's Gospel account of the birth of Jesus, Joseph when he discovers that Mary is pregnant at first responds to break off the engagement. Matthew suggests that he would do this privately in order to not shame Mary – but no doubt there was also an element of embarrassment on Joseph's part. Yet both he and Mary are prepared to cope with the public derision that is most likely to eventuate once the pregnancy becomes public. They are prepared to go along with what God is asking of them such is their trust*)

"I have sometimes found myself walking down the road with someone who is talking loudly or

behaving oddly, and wishing I weren't there. But God is not embarrassed by human company when that company is turning away from self-satisfaction and ready to move on. We might think that God would be 'ashamed' of human company that was imperfect, confused, even sinful. But God is happy to be the God of confused and sinful people when they recognise their own confusion and face the truth of their need. That's what the great parables of Jesus in St Luke's Gospel are so often about, especially the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

"So at Christmas, God shows that he is not ashamed to be with us. He has heard our cries of weakness and self-doubt and unhappy longing, he has seen our wanderings and anxieties, and he is not ashamed to be alongside us in this world, walking with us in our pilgrimage. And because he is content to walk with us, we are challenged about whose company we might be ashamed to share. So easily we decide that we would be ashamed to share the company of the sinful, the doubting or the outcast. But God, it seems, is not ashamed to be seen with such people. If he is ashamed to be called the God of any human group, the text from Hebrews strongly suggests that he is most 'embarrassed' by those who think they have arrived at the end of their journey, who think they have already attained perfection (compare St Paul's angry and scornful words in I Corinthians 4.8 – 'Already you have become rich!'). And it is clear why God would be ashamed to be the God of such people: they behave and speak as if they didn't really need God, as if they didn't really need grace and hope and forgiveness.

"God loves the company of those who know their need, and that is why he comes at Christmas to stand with them, to live with them and to die and rise for them. He is the God who blesses the poor – not only those who are materially poor, but those who are without the 'riches' of self-satisfaction and complacency, those who know all too well how far they fall short of real and full humanity. And so we are to pass on that blessing to the poor of every sort, those who are without material resources and those who are 'poor in spirit' because they know their hunger and need. Let us ask ourselves honestly whose company we are ashamed to be seen in – and then ask where God would be. If he has embraced the failing and fragile world of human beings who know their needs, then we must be there with him.

"May God give us every blessing and joy in the Christmas Season."

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