

# Sermon Notes

**St Mark's Anglican Church  
South Hurstville**

**Christmas**

**Preacher**

**25 December 2007**

**The Reverend Chris Albany  
Rector**

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Readings: Isaiah 9.2-7; Psalm 96. 1-9; Titus 2.11-14; Luke 2.1-20

## **Doers of justice and makers of peace**

Have you cottoned onto the secret that is Christmas? Have you twigged, fully understood, at the very core of your being what this story of a baby born of Mary, out of wedlock is all about? Christmas is about the unmasking, the exposure of the great secret about God. Only it is not supposed to be a secret it's just that so many of God's people, the Hebrews in particular, and still so many today too seemed to have got a quite erroneous and destructive understanding about the nature and character of God. So often God was associated with violence and vengeance and retribution – the Old Testament is full of the ways in which God is implicated in the violence of the world and is seen to be on the side of his people helping them crush and destroy their enemies and oppressors. Not all that different to the rhetoric by certain world leaders in recent years recruiting God on their side in the “War against Terror”.

Added to that God was seen to be the one who is hard to please, who only finds a select few to be acceptable. And yet here we have a story where the central characters are an unmarried couple, a child born out of wedlock, illegitimate - where the parents are afforded not condemnation and derision and ostracisation but rather a place of dignity and respect. If they are acceptable, then is there any one who is not? Clearly not as the unfolding story of Jesus life continually shows. Christmas is the culmination of God's love affair with humankind, which began at the dawn of creation.

The great secret that Christmas exposes is that God is not distant, austere some how set over against us and the world. God is not into violence and retribution and punishment. God is not the bully that so often God is depicted as. No God is Emmanuel, God with us and for us. In Jesus the divine, the sacred is seen to be breaking into this world, intimately sharing human existence. We call that breaking into the world of the sacred Incarnation. Even that we have tended to get wrong for most of the 2000 years of Christendom, We think incarnation is just about Jesus, rather Jesus tells those around him that it is not just he who is the bearer of God in the world but they too are gifted to do the same, as God's daughters and sons. We get it so wrong when we put “only” in front of the appellation “Son of God” next to Jesus name. We are called to be bearers of God, to share in the ongoing work of creation and establishment of justice and peace, co-workers with God and what Jesus reveals to us most of all is that we are not only loved but also liked by the God who journeys with us. That is perhaps the greatest secret of all. God actually likes us and desires relationship, connection communion with us. To know and experience that reality is life changing. It frees us to live fully, without fear of condemnation, without the threat of judgement and condemnation and rejection hanging over us. It enables us to take up the difficult challenge of sorting out our lives and our relationships, knowing that we are not alone, that there is one who will be there and sustain us through the tough times and celebrate with us the moments of joy. It enables us to admit our shortcomings and failures – our sin – and to begin to do something about seeking forgiveness and making amends. To be doers of justice and makers of peace.

To put it another way - using the imagery of the Gospel story we have just heard. We are sometimes like the shepherds sitting on dark hills, needing to be surprised by the divine, needing to hear about

hope. To discover that we are not alone and there is no need to be fearful. So we can be released from all that frightens, and enslaves and keeps us isolated and alienated. We can make our approach in prayer with the shepherds to the Christ child and what he represents. We can bring our gifts. Most importantly the gift of our unique self.

In Jesus we celebrate God's reaching out to all humankind, none written off, none despised, none too strange, too bad, too inhuman. In Jesus we celebrate the meeting of earth and sky: the divine human encounter which gives sense and purpose to existence, the possibility of participating in the life of God and the peace of God in the world of reality. In Jesus we identify the life of God in the finger mixing the mud or writing in the dust, which speaks to me of God identifying with the daily nitty gritty of our lives as we seek out how best to live in the complexity that is our lives today. We identify God in the homeless itinerant, in the broken bread and poured out wine. Life lived fully and deeply, pain and joy mingled together. Surely there is no other way to truly live.

Have a truly blessed and Joyous Christmas and may you know above all the great secret that Jesus came to let us in on. God is indeed Emmanuel God with us and for us. He not only loves you at the very core of your being he also likes you. Blessed be God.

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