



Alstonville
Anglicans

Sunday 27th December 2020
Christmas 1

Welcome

Sunday@9am Anglican Service in the Ministry Centre

Sunday@10am online via webpage www.anglicans.live



Sharing the Good Life

We acknowledge the Bundjalung people,
Traditional custodians of the Land.
Our doors are open: LGBTQIA+ welcome here.
Streaming licence CCLI#690910

Thought for the week

On the first Sunday after Christmas, we meditate on the Presentation of Christ in the temple. Luke 2 makes clear the Jewish nature of Jesus' upbringing and hints at the devoutness of his parents in fulfilling the requirements of the law. The presentation of Christ in the temple highlights the many ways in which Jesus was a product of his society and culture. Similarly, we can reflect on how we are a product of our society and culture. What is the culture and tradition of your family? What are the major world events that have shaped you? What are the best characteristics of your parents that you wish to emulate? In addition to our meditation of the Presentation of Christ in the temple, today is also Candlemas. Candlemas is when the candles that are to be used in the year ahead are "presented" in our "temple" and blessed. The Song of Simeon inspires Candlemas: "Lord, you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised; For these eyes of mine have seen the Saviour, whom you have prepared for all the world to see: A Light to enlighten the nations, and the Glory of your people Israel (Luke 2:29-32)." The blessed candles are a living prayer to the Light that enlightens all and the ways in which we share in that light:

"Light kindles light and flame kindles flame. When God sets the world on fire with His love, in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit, there isn't any less of God at the end of the process, but there's a lot more of us." Rowan Williams.

Liturgy for 20th December

Sentence of the Day

Collect

Prayer of the Day for the First Sunday After Christmas

Saving God,
whose Son Jesus was presented in the temple
and was acclaimed the glory of Israel
and the light of the nations:
grant that in him we may be presented to you
and in the world may reflect his glory;
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Readings

Luke 2.22-40

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.' ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Reflection

A reflection on Luke 1:26-38 for Advent 4 on 20 December 2020

Virgins

Introduction

Much has been said about the Mary the virgin. This is not a debate I wish to enter now, except to state that today's advent meditation on Mary invites us to be virgins. We are all invited to be spiritual virgins because the incarnation is a universal principle, not a one-off event. The incarnation is a universal principle because when God became Jesus, God said "yes" to physicality, "yes" to matter. God is always coming into the world, moment by moment, through each of us virgins birthing divinity into materiality.

Mary is a symbol of humankind's acceptance of God

It is said that Jesus is how God offers the holiness of God's divinity to humanity, how God is available to humankind. Mary is how humankind offers the holiness of humanity to God's divinity, a symbol of humankind saying yes to the presence of God. In other words, If Jesus is a living symbol of how God totally gives Godself to creation, then Mary is living symbol of how humanity gratefully and fully receives the gift of God. That is why for some Anglo Catholics there is a devotion to Mary, she represents all of us. When we like Mary are able to say "Let it be," then we are truly spiritual virgins, and have arrived at Christmas fully prepared and ready.

What does it mean to be a spiritual virgin?

A virgin is one without history, likewise a spiritual virgin discontinues the God of history and gives birth to the God of eternity.

The moment when we teach about God, the moment when we preach about God, the moment when we draw a picture of God, we are at that moment continuing the God of history, the God of the history of the church, the God of the history of religions, and the God of human history.

The moment when we experience God in the secret cave of the heart, the moment when we find God deep within ourselves as our truest selves, that present experience of God is the experience of the God of eternity, and at that moment we have become spiritual virgins.

The God of history is a "second-hand" experience of God offered through liturgy, hymns, preaching and teaching, it is the faith of our Sunday school teachers. The God of eternity is the firsthand experience of God when one is fully present to the present.

What is being described today, needs to be said. Some will intrinsically and immediately understand. Some may be confused and wonder what I am talking about. That is okay, one day the experience will become clear and you will know immediately within your own experience what it means to be a spiritual virgin.

It is okay to not fully understand because Moses also did not understand. Moses, a shepherd, looks after his father-in-law's sheep in the deserts of Midianite territory. Moses would have spent hours in silence and solitude, caring for sheep in the wilderness areas. One day he passes vegetation that he passes nearly every day for the last 40 years, but this time the vegetation seems to be aflame with the presence of God. Moses has a mystical experience when he encounters the presence of God at "a burning bush". He says "Who are you God". God says: "I am who I am." In other words, the God of eternity. Moses says: 'I don't have a clue what that means.' It was difficult for Moses to relate to that eternal aspect of God. God says, okay, " I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob." In other words, the God of history.

The God of history desires continuity; divides human beings and demands loyalty. The God of history lies at the heart of religious wars and denominational conflict. God desires that human beings be free from this God of history and authority. The Virgin Mary was chosen by God to discontinue the God of history, (the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob) and give birth to God of 'I am who I am'. This child, born of a virgin, is not identified with the past but with eternity. This child is not called son of Mary or Joseph, but the Child of God.

“Le point vierge”

How do we become spiritual virgins? E become spiritual virgins by living from the eternal centre of our beings. Thomas Merton describes a “le point vierge” [a virgin point] at the centre of his being:

At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God ... This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak His name written in us, as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely ... I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is every- where.

Thomas Merton says he cannot define le point vierge so he describes his sudden “realization” while on the corner of 4th and Walnut in Louisville. While shopping Thomas gazes across the many other shoppers and is enraptured:

Then it was as if I saw the secret beauty in their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God’s eyes.”

This is the le point vierge – the virgin point. At the moment of this experience Thomas Merton has discovered that he is a spiritual virgin.



The point of being a spiritual virgin means that we give birth to or we manifest the divine attributes of love and compassion in our human relationships. We are all meant to be mothers of God, as the Swiss Hans von Balthasar says:

Balthasar says:

We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And, what good it is to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of Man is begotten in us (von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler, 2005, p. 42).

Richard Rohr responds to this quote:

As a man who has taken a vow of celibacy, I will never know what it is like to physically give birth, nor have I ever held the hand of a woman I love in labour—neither sister nor friend. However, I have experienced the birth of Christ in the world many times throughout my life—in big ways and small, sometimes through grand gestures, but more often through simple acts of patience, love, and mercy. To incarnate the Christ is to live out the Gospel with our lives, as faithfully and fearlessly as a woman in labor who holds nothing back in order to bring new life into the world. Center for Action and Contemplation 2020. : <https://cac.org/becoming-icons-of-christ-2020-12-11>.

We gestate God into the world through every act of love, kindness, gentleness, empathy, and compassion. Sister Illia Delio describes birthing divinity into the world on macro and micro levels:

We can read the history of our 13.7-billion-year-old universe as the rising up of Divine Love incarnate, which bursts forth in the person of Jesus, who reveals love's urge toward wholeness through reconciliation, mercy, peace, and forgiveness. Jesus is the love of God incarnate, the wholemaker who shows the way of evolution toward unity in love. In Jesus, God breaks through and points us in a new direction; not one of chance or blindness but one of ever-deepening wholeness in love. In Jesus, God comes to us from the future to be our future. Those who follow Jesus are to become wholemakers, uniting what is scattered, creating a deeper unity in love. Christian life is a commitment to love, to give birth to God in one's own life and to become midwives of divinity in this evolving cosmos. We are to be wholemakers of love in a world of change (in *Oneing* 1.1 page 22)

In this final week of advent, we are all invited to be mothers of God, birthing the divine attributes of love, compassion, empathy and kindness into the world. Mary's story is one that we treasure. Kathleen Norris writes that she treasures the icon of Mary because it confronts her with a powerful question: When the mystery of God's love breaks through into my consciousness, do I run from it? . . . Or am I virgin enough to respond from my deepest, truest self, and say something new, a "yes" that will change me forever? [2]

Sources

- Delio, Ilia. 2013. Love at the Heart of the Universe in The Perennial Tradition. **Oneing: vol. 1, no. 1**. Note: This edition of *Oneing* is out of print.
- Norris, Kathleen . 1999. **Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith**. (New York: Riverhead Books). Pages 74-77.
- Rohr, Richard. 2020. **Giving Birth to Christ: [Becoming Icons of Christ](https://cac.org/becoming-icons-of-christ-2020-12-11)**. Center for Action and Contemplation on Friday, December 11, 2020. Accessed from: <https://cac.org/becoming-icons-of-christ-2020-12-11>.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. 2005. **Love Alone Is Credible**. trans. Schindler, D C. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press). First edition. Note: this quote is wrongly attributed to Meister Eckhardt.

Finance

Alstonville Anglicans - Offertory Options

Your offertory can be made using the following options:

- Direct transfer to our bank account BSB 705 077 /
Acc:00032931

Thank you for your support

We are a COVID Safe church group

Thank you for continuing to keep yourselves and others safe, especially at this Christmas time, by :

- (1) Keeping a 1.5 m distance
- (2) Using face masks
- (3) Sanitising your hands on entry to the Ministry Centre
- (4) Not attending if you have any COVID symptoms
- (5) Recording your name (using QR code with your mobile phone if you are able). This is for safety contact reasons – proven so importantly in Sydney / Melbourne etc
- (6) Not congregating too closely outside the church buildings for morning teas
(but please join us for a COVID safe “cuppa” after the service today)

For those still a little uncomfortable about being in groups, remember that you can watch our services on FaceBook or via the internet Alstonville Anglicans anglicans.live

Please note: Public Health orders are rapidly changing this week so Thanks for your patience / understanding if we have to quickly change our “rules” eg. no singing again / strongly encouraged to wear masks / back to the 4 sqm spacing etc

Upcoming dates for your diary

Monday 28th

The office is closed until the 4th January.

In case of emergency please phone Desiree 040 276 4969

Op shop

The op Shop is closed until Monday 11th January 2021

Wednesday 30th

No Anam Cara until 6th January

Friday 1st January

No Friday service on 1st January. Normal Friday services will then continue through January.

Sunday 3rd January 2021 9am

Holy Communion on The Feast of Epiphany.

Note: St Peter and St Paul's worship together again on 14th January.

ANGLICAN PARISH OF ALSTONVILLE

Ministers	all the baptised!	
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