



Salutations and greetings to you all! It seems like it was only just Easter a few months ago, and here we are at Advent. Time seems to pass more quickly these days, or is it that I am just filling it with more busyness? I think that we can all agree that Advent tends to be a time of busy-ness. As we immerse ourselves in the preparations of the Season, it is equally important that we take time to reflect on whether our busyness actually serves God at this time.

I have spent some time this year focusing on the concept of Trust. Trusting in God, trusting in others, trusting in self. There is a great deal of trust held within the nativity story. Beginning with Elizabeth. A woman of advanced age, who had not been blessed with children but had lived a "Righteous and blameless life" (Luke 1:6) She had lived a life trusting in God's provision. Then her husband is visited by an angel, and told that her life would be changed beyond measure. That she would bear a child, a child who would herald in the new King, after waiting for a child for seemingly a lifetime, finally they would receive this blessing. Both Elizabeth and Zachariah had trusted that they would be blessed by the Lord, and their trust was rewarded.

Mary equally trusted in God. She trusted the words of the Angel that said "The Holy Spirit would come upon her" (Luke 1:35) and she would conceive the Son of God. This information must have been completely overwhelming, completely unbelievable, and yet her response is one of complete trust. "Here I am, let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1:38) These are words of true trust. There was no doubt, she knew that this was God's will upon her life.

Then we have Joseph. Perhaps the one who's trust was most tested by this miracle. Joseph, who no doubt felt betrayed by his betrothed, once he discovered that she was pregnant. A righteous man, who was willing to "Dismiss her quietly" (Matthew 1:19) rather than humiliate or punish her. Until he too, was visited by an Angel, who told him of the miracle that would soon come into the world. Can you possibly imagine, how it would have felt, to carry the expectation of parenting the Son of God. An awesome responsibility, perhaps one would say, unenviable.

As we move through life, we don't always emulate this level of Trust in God. In fact, there are times when we do not trust God with the most important aspects of our lives. I know that at times I have not wanted to "Bother God" with my insignificant problems. After all, the creator of heaven and earth, the one who turns the single cell into new life, has more to concern Himself with, than my day to day issues. Equally, if I give these concerns over to God, then I am trusting myself to let them go, and subsequently accept His decision upon the outcome. Trusting God to know what I need in my life hasn't always been easy, and yet it seems to come more easily with age.

I have always loved these particular words from the 14th century theologian, Julian of Norwich. "See that I am God. See that I am in everything. See that I do everything. See that I have never stopped ordering my works, nor ever shall, eternally. See that I lead everything on to the conclusion I ordained for it since time began, by the same power wisdom and love which I made it. How could anything be a miss."

I pray that you all have a blessed and safe Christmas, and that the New Year brings you deeper faith, deeper peace, and a closer relationship with the Divine.

Mandy Stark

THE PRESIDENT WRITES

Having been away for two months this winter it hardly seems possible that Advent is nearly upon us as I write. I'm not ready for this time of the year. My thinking is still back in the season of the church year when we consider the teachings of Jesus and our call to ministry and what it means for us. However, the Gospel considered last Sunday brought me up short. Those 'wise and foolish' virgins, some prepared and some not was a clear reminder that it was time that I, too, became ready to once again to meet our Christ. When I say 'once again', it can lead to considering the encounter as a comfortable reunion, much like the annual or regular family gatherings that are filled with renewal of relationships and sharing of stories.

Our re-encountering of Christ each Christmas in our worship and reflection can be that, but we are called to much more than that. Each year we are different, and the environment and situations in which we live are different. This time of Advent gives us the opportunity to reflect on how our lives have changed. Have our experiences of the past year changed our thinking about how we view the world and the issues around us? Has our faith grown or been challenged in unexpected ways? We must make time in Advent to pray and reflect and thus prepare ourselves to meet the child of Bethlehem anew. I'm sure that every one of us has already made comments about how events crowd our days and evenings at this time of the year. No matter how many carols there are to hear, end of year break-up lunches to attend we must keep spaces to quietly spend time with our God, preparing ourselves for the event of wonder, of God breaking into our lives. There are varied ways to do this; using a daily devotional

series especially for Advent, a quiet time of meditation, perhaps while walking each day. The list could go on. I encourage you to take the time to engage in the preparation that truly prepares for the coming mystery.

Most of you will be leading worship in these coming weeks. May you bring the sense of preparing to those to whom you minister as you share God's Word with them.

God's peace and blessings to you this Advent as you meet the surprises that God gives you and may you be filled with joy as we celebrate God's coming to us at Christmas.

Lou Anne Stabb

PRESBYTERY REPORTS

Gippsland

Peter Morris

Some years ago the members of a small congregation told me that in ten years most of them would be in heaven and perhaps there wouldn't be a congregation there anymore. They also said that the LORD has given them things to do and they would be doing them joyfully.

It is encouraging to hear of so many people engaged in leading worship and preaching in Gippsland. The clergy, lay preachers and other lay leaders say they are glad of their calling and are doing about as much as they can. There are

people providing worship in nursing homes, some lead services on a couple of Sundays a year when there is no one else available, and congregations who often read services from other sources to maintain a joyful worship in their community.

Our challenge is to encourage and support people who are busy and scattered over a large area. Our recent day with Sunny Chen on preaching from Year B of the Lectionary and sharing the resources we find helpful, was a wonderful opportunity. There is also a call to pray from each other, to take time to talk about our joys and frustrations in the ministry, and encourage each other.

We have much to be thankful for and the words of Zephaniah 3:17 seem quite appropriate to us.

"For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty Saviour. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful song."

North East Victoria Joan McRae

We postponed our Lay Preachers' Day until all the other attractions were over - and now find we don't have a Saturday left in November. So we'll need to leave it until February for a Year B day of sharing.

However, our Lay Preachers have had several excellent opportunities in the presbytery for continuing education. Last time I mentioned Wisdom's Feast, which we co-hosted with the CTM. Most recently, in October, Chris Barnett from the CTM has brought his Re-Gen days to four centres here, attended by over 100 people, including Lay Preachers and Candidates. These sessions have caused a great buzz through the presbytery, leading to a number of further initiatives, including more Re-Gen sessions in other centres next year. We recommend them to your presbytery!

Our Supply PMME, Jeanne Beale, has held a series of Listening Skills Seminars (three sessions), also attended by Lay Preachers and Candidates. There has been excellent feedback from those attending these sessions.

Three Safe Church training days have been held so far; others will be held across the presbytery.

One Candidate has begun her services for assessment; at the other end of their ministry, two Lay Preachers have retired. We thank God for their faithful service and for the gift of those setting out as Lay Preachers.

Port Phillip East Di Paterson

A few of our Lay Preacher candidates have taken some services in the Presbytery in the last few months. At least one of our Lay Preachers who went to the selection conference as a candidate for Minister of the Word, was successful and that is very exciting. We are still working through the final assessment for another candidate and hope to have him commissioned before the end of the year. We have many of our Lay Preachers

regularly involved in leading worship at a number of Churches in the Presbytery.

Port Philip West Rob Coulson

1. We welcome our latest LP Candidate John Bader and wish him God's blessings as he commences his studies.
2. A workshop (Preaching from the Old Testament) was conducted on 11 November.
3. We are sorry to lose the Presbytery Minister, Mission and Education (Rev Dr Adam McIntosh) and extend God's blessings as he moves to a new calling with the Queensland Synod. We give thanks for his commitment and support of Lay Worship over the past few years.

Tasmania - vacant

Yarra Yarra Haley Rose

Our Annual meeting was held on 8 October with 20 people in attendance. Our guest speaker was Lou-Anne Stabb. Lou-Anne led an engaging discussion on what we enjoy about being a lay preacher and what changes we would like to see in the future. This was followed by a session on presenting the early word.

During our meeting we thanked Tony Lemmon for all his work and support on Yarra Yarra Lay Preacher committees over many years as Tony and Jan retired from the Committee of management. We committed to merging the Yarra Yarra Lay Preacher's Committee of Management and Lay Preachers Association, this will now go to presbytery for endorsement. We are commissioned James Tang as a recognised LP on Sunday 5 November. We have a new candidate in Maiava Alesana who has probably finished her studies and has started doing her assessed services.

Advent Reflection

“In those days ... the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.” So begins our entry into the Season of Advent, according to the Gospel of Mark. These are Jesus’ ominous words to his disciples.

If you have ever experienced significant change in your life, whether it was desired or dreaded, then you will know about “those days.” You know about Advent. You know what it is like to enter the darkness of change. All change, whether welcome or unwanted, brings some kind of loss. It may be the loss of a relationship, the loss of a loved one, the loss of what is comfortable, familiar, and safe.

These times frequently come with questions. Deep, faith-filled questions. How will we find our way forward when the light that illumined our path no longer shine? What do we do when it feels as if our world is falling apart? Where do we go when it seems as if darkness is our only companion and God/the light is nowhere to be seen?

These are threshold moments. The temptation is to do something; to attempt to fix it, to try and ease the pain, to escape the uncertainty, and to get back to what used to be. The God of Advent does not allow that. For we can never go back to the way it was before. God does not undo our life. God redeems our lives. Advent is not so much about the losses as it is about the hope and coming of what will be. That hope and coming is the Son of Man, Jesus the Christ.

The Advent times, are times of waiting. They are liminal times. In Advent we live between what was, and what will be. We are neither here nor there. Often the waiting is tortuous, even painful. They remind us that we do not know everything. We do not see all possibilities. We can neither predict nor control anything. We are not in charge. Advent invites us to

receive the God who comes to us in the darkness of life.

Be alert,” Jesus warns. He commands us to “Keep awake.” Darkness is not our enemy as much as is falling asleep. We fall asleep whenever we allow fear to control our life, when hope gives way to despair, when busyness is equated with goodness, when entitlement replaces graciousness, when we choose what is comfortable rather than what is life-giving.

The Advent times of our lives ask us to trust the Coming One more than the darkness. It means we must sit, listen and wait. Even when all we want to do is act. We must be present in our lives not just in spite of, but because of the darkness. To show up and be present in the darkness of life is some of the hardest work we will ever do. And yet, it is a requirement of faith.

In the darkness of Advent we move slower, we listen more than we speak, we hold questions rather than answers. We wait expectantly but without specific expectations. Waiting in darkness is an act of faithfulness and surrender to the Coming One. Waiting becomes our prayer, a prayer that is and will be answered by God’s presence.

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