

Christmas Day 2007

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Phil 2: 5 – 11 and John 1: 1 – 18

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I don't know how many of you have seen the Richard Curtis film "Love Actually". It is a feel good, star studded, Christmas movie, released a few years ago but which gets replayed on TV at this time of year.

There is a lovely scene where a loving mother Karen, played by Emma Thomson, is helping her 6 year old daughter get her costume ready for the school Christmas nativity play. She is informed by her excited daughter that she is a lobster.

"A lobster" says Emma Thomson with controlled amusement.

"The first lobster" responds her daughter.

"Oh", replies Emma Thomson, "You mean there was more than one lobster present at the birth of Jesus?"

Her daughter sighs and then with all the superiority and indulgence of know it all six year old looks at her mother askance and says, "Durrrrr!"

I love nativity plays. I love excited children, mothers fussing over tea cloths on shepherds heads and adjusting angel wings, nonchalant but very proud fathers moving bales of hay and keeping toddlers from running off, beaming wet eyed grand parents. I love the message of Christmas being acted out – of children learning by doing, taking part in an act of remembrance that celebrates the most amazing event in all history.

As we come to celebrate this most amazing event in all of history let me try to open some windows on what God was up to. And then let's see how we can respond.

Many people speak of finding God in creation. They find that they are awakened afresh to an awareness of God as they see a sunset, climb a mountain, walk on a beach or through a desert. The vastness and the "unspoiltness" of nature quickens and lifts our spirits.

In those moments we take in what is around us – we see the distant horizon, we hear the sounds of waves crashing on the shore, we smell the aroma of lavender crushed by the garden hose, we taste the sweet grape - and

knowing that we did nothing to make it come into being we are filled with wonder and awe.

We are awakened to what is old and always has been, and which at the same time is new and fresh and alive now. We are invited and beckoned us to look beyond ourselves

But for all its wonder, and although it is declared “very good” by God when he has done the work of creation, it is not complete.

The ultimate act of creation is when God the Creator steps into his creation.

Genesis begins the story of creation...

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

St John begins his Gospel in like manner ...

¹In the beginning ...

... but he speaks of the one who is Creator, the Word of God, the one who speaks the heavens and earth into being, but then enters that creation.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

God who created all that we see and hear and touch and taste and feel and smell ... God stepped into this creation in as a child born to a virgin named Mary who was engaged to Joseph (a man whose lineage is traced back to Abraham), born in the town of Bethlehem in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod the tetrarch of Galilee and during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.

It is that specific and detailed.

When we are moved by the wonder of creation we can get lost in the anonymity and vastness of it all. We soon end up theorising and generalising, and the danger we face is of all of this dissolving into sublime feelings or wonderful ideas or ambitious projects.

But John’s Gospel starting as it does linking inextricably Creation and Incarnation prevents dilutions and dissolutions. God who is creator comes into the specifics of life. He is not just out there in the vastness of the sunset and the starry host on a clear night; he is with you as you walk from kitchen to bedroom, from parking lot to work place, from sanctuary to cemetery, from classroom to playing field.

This is why he is called Emman- u-el (God with us).

But not only is he the Creator, and not only is he the one who comes among us.

He is the Re-creator. He comes to make all things new. He comes to bring wholeness and healing. He comes to lift us up in wonder and praise not just as we step into the vastness of nature, but in the ordinary stuff of every day life.

Paul puts it so clearly and starkly. (2 Cor 5:17)

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:
The old has gone, the new is here!*

In the Greek the second verb is not there and literally it reads:

If anyone in Christ – new creation!

It is a brand new day. In Jesus, God is making all things new. That is the vision John has of the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21:5

The one seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new."

This is what we are celebrating today. The creator of the cosmos, the one who flings stars into space and who paints the sunset sky, the one who shapes mountains and designs butterfly wings; the one who sets atoms and molecules in place; the one who puts planets into orbit and positions the galaxies and constellations; the Creator of the entire cosmos entered his creation as a child, born to a virgin girl in Bethlehem.

The care taken over recording the specifics is that this Creator God comes specifically and particularly to you, to quicken your spirits not only to the vast wonder of creation, but to the new fresh re-creation that God wants to bring specifically and particularly to you.

So where are you right now? What are the particulars and specifics you face today – this Christmas?

Let me invite you to enter again the nativity scene. Look at the crowd gathered around the manger. Where are you in that scene?

Perhaps you are a shepherd – only too aware of the vulnerability and precariousness of life? You have endured more than your fair share of long

nights, and you know that a bear or lion could take out a few sheep and before you know it your year end results would be knocked for six and you will end up showing a loss after all the blood sweat and tears you have put in this year.

Vulnerable, precarious – those would be words that describe your reality.

Perhaps you are an angel – your heart is full of praise singing for joy because you have seen God at work? The wonder and mystery of God thrills your heart and you have a song on your lips and thanksgiving in your heart.

Awe, wonder, thanksgiving – those are the words that describe your reality.

Perhaps you are one of the wise men – you have been round the block a few times. You have seen it all before. There is not much that surprises you these days. You have done Christmas before and you don't expect this one will be any different.

Sceptically cautious – would be the words that describe you in the nativity scene.

Perhaps you the camel – essentially you are the transport. That is why you are here. Given half a chance you would be sleeping under a tree some where, but well they needed bringing and so you came. Well bless your heart. Thank you!

But "*present under sufferance and duty*" would describe your reality as you enter the nativity scene.

Perhaps you are the inn keeper – anxious about many things? A late arrival – she heavily pregnant and them not even married. Now all these extra visitors pitching up. Things are not working out as planned. Everything is spinning out of control and you feel like just abandoning ship and booking yourself into a your neighbour's B&B for the rest of the holiday season.

Flustered and anxious - would be the words describing your reality right now.

Perhaps you are the lobster (first or second lobster) – if truth be told you don't fit into the story and you feel like a misfit and you should not be here.

Awkward and out of place - would be the words to describe your reality.

Perhaps you are the donkey – you know you have an important part to play – you will be carrying baby Jesus into exile when Herod begins the slaughter of the innocents, and then you will be carrying him into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as he begins his final journey that will take him to the cross. You feel very responsible for how things work out. Your role is crucial and yet you feel quite powerless in it all.

Carrying a burden and responsibility - would be the words used to describe your reality.

Perhaps you are you Joseph – you know God has spoken to you and you know what to do. You are a good person who tries to do the right thing and are happy to take a back seat and be out of the lime light. No body asks your opinion or how you really are. They just ask you to help. Some times you feel taken for granted.

So reliable and responsible but taken for granted – that would describe your reality.

Perhaps you are Mary – wow, this is amazing. Who would have thought you would be here in this place. What lies ahead is rather scary but you would have it no other way. God is in all of what you face and you feel humbled but willing to do what ever it takes.

Humbly expectant – that would describe your reality.

Now where ever you are this morning ...

- vulnerable, precarious, awe struck, sceptical, cautious,
- “present under sufferance and duty”
- flustered and anxious,
- awkward and out of place
- carrying a burden of responsibility
- being responsible but feeling taken for granted
- humbly expectant

... where ever you are this Christmas morning the invitation comes freshly to you from the one whose birth we celebrate.

The Creator whose creation opens us up to see beyond ourselves with fresh awe and wonder, comes to live among us and particularly and specifically enters our world, to heal and make all things new.

I invite you to make a response from where you are ...

- vulnerable, precarious, awe struck, sceptical, cautious,
- “present under sufferance and duty”
- flustered and anxious,
- awkward and out of place
- carrying a burden of responsibility
- being responsible but feeling taken for granted
- humbly expectant

... and in the words of the Christmas Carol say ...

O holy Child of Bethlehem (the one born to Mary)
 Descend to us, we pray (come to where I am right now)
 Cast out our sin (all that keeps me separated from you) and enter in
 Be born in us today (may you live in me).
 We hear the Christmas angels
 The great glad tidings tell
 O come to us, abide with us
 Our Lord Emmanuel (God with us).