

Pako Morning Service: 11/12/16

Reading: Isa 7:1-14; Matthew 1:22-23; Message - "God with Us"

Congregation, I once went to a stage show that depicted the Christmas story and I thought it was quite telling at the time. The opening scene was the usual nativity scene with Joseph and Mary and the little baby Jesus on the centre of the stage. And then gradually, people from all walks of life came onto the stage to pass on their congratulations and gifts. First the wise men, dressed in middle eastern clothing, and then as we moved through the centuries, the clothing changed, but so did the position of Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus. As more people come to pass on their congratulations, you see this subtle shift that occurs. Instead of Joseph and Mary and the baby Jesus being the centre of attention, the people who come, now in much greater numbers, greet and pass their gifts on to each other. The play ends with Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus finding themselves pushed into a little corner, no longer the centre of attention.

Now I realize it was only a play, but it pictures exactly what we see today in our world and in our shopping centres. If there is a nativity scene, it's somewhere to the side and Santa, the photographers and their tills are taking center stage. We see a similar thing occurring with the Carols in the Park. It's more about the latest Australia's got talent stars being promoted. Or it's about their latest album that has just been released, but the factual story of Jesus's birth is hardly mentioned, except in the odd lyrics of some songs. So today, two weeks out from Christmas, I want to encourage you to make sure that the Christmas child is still front and center of your celebrations this Christmas. I don't want Jesus to be little more than an excuse for a holiday or a party or some family time, or even an insurance policy for you as he is for so many in this world today. The birth of Jesus is the greatest and very best news, yes even for modern 21<sup>st</sup> century man, though he does not recognize it.

The most important question facing all of us as we go into the New Year is not whether Malcom Turnbull will still be PM or if Trump will survive, or whether we will have been diagnosed with some serious illness or whether we will become parents or grand parents again, but whether Jesus is the center of you life. You see, when this baby Jesus was born, God came to live with us! Immanuel! Here is the One and Only Son of God, being conceived in a most miraculous way by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, who has come to live and die for sinners so that believing, he can be their Saviour. I put it to you that most of us, yours truly included, do not value nearly enough the gift of life that we have been given and think way too little about eternal matters.

Don't think too much about tertiary entrance score, or how your big bash team is going, or your footy team, or even that matter your business or career. Not that some of these things aren't important, but the more important thing is to consider Jesus and what he means for you. This past week, a forty-four-year rugby referee in NZ dropped dead mid pitch while referring. His friends could not understand how this could happen to a guy who was very fit, a mountain bike rider, and who was just the nicest guy with the nicest family. My daughter's four-year-old son died this past week of meningitis. Healthy one week – eternity the next. There are many events that occur like that every week.

Now I know it's rather depressing that I mention these things, but I do so for I want you to know how great it is that God has provided a Saviour and we must not push the importance of him for ourselves and our neighbour aside. God in his wonderful grace promised the coming of this baby from the moment our first parents sinned. That's why his genealogy is listed in this gospel and in Luke's gospel. What's more, Matthew points out that he was born in the same place as Israel's great king David, a thousand years earlier, and he is a descendant of father Abraham. And the gist of verses 22-23 is that "God is with us". Here is the center of all history! Please don't push him aside. King Herod wanted to kill Him. The Jews didn't want to know Him. And by and large, many people today don't want to know him either!

But this baby is God's answer to man's biggest problem! And man's biggest problem is God's pronouncement of eternal death for our sins after he had created everything very good! That's our problem. It's bad that man is at war with man in this world, but worse by far is that man is at war with the very God who created him and to whom he must give an account when he breathes his last! So don't push this baby Jesus aside, for he is the answer to our problem. The only way we can ever know peace with our Creator God, is to know Jesus as our Saviour. And thankfully, God the Father, knowing our problem, brings about the birth of His Son to pay for our rebellion against Him. And the message of the bible, the message of Christmas is that without Jesus as your Saviour, without Him being the center of your life, we can never have peace with God. We cannot know what true forgiveness is and what true freedom is and what true joy is without him. So the good news this Christmas day is what the Angel brings to Joseph. The baby born of Mary is God coming to us in the form of His one and only Son. It's amazing, God dwelling amongst us. The Apostle John summed it up so nicely in the first chapter of his gospel, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among

us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the father, full of truth and grace" (John 1:14). So the Christmas story is God reaching down to sinful mankind in the flesh of His Son, Jesus Christ to be their Saviour. That is what we celebrate. "God with us." This is God's present to man, himself! The very Son of God, who has all power, all wisdom, all love, all compassion and grace, coming to bring peace between our Creator and us. So whatever you do today, please don't push him aside for without him, there can be no forgiveness and hence no real peace and no real joy. Not now or ever for that is what is taught clearly in Scripture! My prayer is that people will come to know this baby as their Saviour and then they could begin to have some answers to the many difficult questions they have about life and eternity!

I don't know why a forty-four-year supposedly very fit rugby referee drops dead, or a four-year-old child dies of meningitis, but this I do know, God has provided a Saviour who guarantees eternal life for all who would simply believe and trust in his completed work! Perhaps God causes these tragedies to occur as a wake up call to sinful mankind. Don't go through life without Jesus and don't leave life without him! Embrace him, the one I have provided, to be your Saviour. It's only when we have Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, that some of these tragic things that happen can make any sense. Doesn't mean we don't grieve with those who grieve, of course we do and must. However, if we just thought about the brevity of life and how vulnerable we are a little more, and compare that with what God has done for us in Christ, it would bring real meaning and joy into our lives and our existence. Indeed, it would cause us to bow and worship and give God glory and to sin less! So I say again, don't push Jesus aside.

So we need to constantly ask ourselves and perhaps to re-evaluate our commitment where are we at with Jesus. Don't ask, where are you at with the Church or the minister or the elders or some Christian brother or sister or even family member. That may be important, but the question is, "Where is Jesus in your life?" Matthew announced, "God is with us" and I want Him to be with you too! I want you to come to a point in your life, where you can say, "Jesus is center of my life! He gives me purpose for living, for working hard at school, in my job, in my business, and for dying. He gives me joy now, tomorrow and will so for all eternity!"

Now you would have noticed that this saying, "Immanuel," "God with us" comes from the Prophet Isaiah. There was a king whose name was Ahaz, he was King of Judah. He had the knack of making all the right noises, but he didn't trust God. At a certain time, King Pekah of the northern tribes, and King Rezin of Aram were threatening Judah. And God said to Ahaz, don't worry, they will not over power you. In fact, God challenges Ahaz to ask Him for a sign so that he can show Ahaz what he says will surely happen. But Ahaz, instead of asking God for a sign, piously says that he would not put the Lord to the test. What hypocrisy. We are not testing God when we do what he says! And at the time despite Ahaz, the LORD, through the prophet, announced the birth of "Immanuel." God had not forgotten his promise to King David, and that his family line would remain on the throne and that salvation for his covenant people would come from that line.

And 2000 years ago, the time came when God fulfilled that promise. God sent his Son, this child. "Immanuel, God with us." The faithful God has always promised to be with his people. He told Abraham that he would go with him. He told Moses and he told his wandering people as they left Egypt. He told Joshua and Gideon and King David, and Solomon, and all his people through the prophets. And 2000 years ago he has come to us in the most remarkable way. What God promises, he does! Congregation, when you have your Christmas dinner ask each other, what does it mean for you that God is with us? For those who love the Lord Jesus as their Saviour it means forgiveness, peace, joy and purpose for life. That is in fact what the angel said in the previous verse. The birth of the "Immanuel" means salvation from sin for everyone who believes.

One other thing, "Immanuel" "God with us," although fulfilled on Christmas Day, what we sometimes refer to as "the already" there is a sense of "not yet" in all of this. Yes, the already is that we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, and we can look back and be reminded of God's fulfilled promises. Yet there is another day coming when we will not need to celebrate without Jesus being present. One day Jesus will return and on that day, (Rev 21:3) ... the dwelling of God will be with men, and He will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

Then there will be no more sin and no more sickness and no more death! No more forty-four-year old people dropping dead or little boys dying of meningitis. Come quickly Lord Jesus. Please don't push Jesus aside. Amen.