

## Jeff's Reflection – December 27

A child is born...and if members of the child's family are part of a Christian faith community, that child may one Sunday morning be held in the arms of a minister who will touch drops of water to the child's head and baptize the child.

Following the worship service, people may congratulate the parents and tell them how beautiful their baby is, how cute, how attentive.

Probably no one will tell the parents that history will hinge upon this child's life!!

But that's what Mary and Joseph were told when they brought baby Jesus to the temple 40 days after he had been born.

According to the laws of Moses, the firstborn child, after 40 days, should be brought to God's temple to be dedicated to God.

That is the context for today's scripture passage from the gospel of Matthew.

Mary and Joseph bring their child to the temple, and there they meet Simeon and Anna, two people who have been living in a state of advent, a state of expecting the birth of God's new creation, the introduction of God's new game plan.

Simeon and Anna are elders – Anna is described as being of a 'great age'. We are not told very much about either of them, but we are told enough to know that they each lived with a sense of life's tension; they lived in the time 'that is' while yearning for a time that would come; lived with a promise that had not yet been fulfilled; lived with a hope that they might live to see at least the beginning of God's new beginning.

First Simeon approaches the young parents, asking if he can hold their baby. What they didn't know was that Simeon had been told that he would not die before he had seen God's anointed one, the one who would bring to fruition the prayer that God's will be done on earth as in heaven.

Simeon holds Jesus, but speaks to God, saying that now he has seen God's salvation for the world, the light has come into the world.

Simeon returns Jesus to his parents, who don't take many more steps before Anna finds them, and she also begins to give thanks to God for this child who everyone has been waiting for to redeem Jerusalem.

I wonder if Mary and Joseph were beginning to wonder what God had gotten them into!

It's what others before them had wondered – Abram and Sarai, Moses, Ruth, David, Bathsheba, Jacob, Isaiah, even Job... what has God gotten me into?

It's a good question for thinking about the Christmas story. Anna and Simeon testify that in some amazing way, God has gotten into world history in the birth of this child, and now we wonder what God, in the birth of this child, has gotten us into.

When Jesus becomes an adult, he will tell us what God has gotten us into – his favourite way of describing what God has gotten us into was the phrase “the kingdom of God.”

‘The kingdom of God’ – what God’s regime would look like, what the world would look like if we treated the world and each other as if it really was God’s world, God’s dream, God’s home!

The kingdom of God – what has God gotten us into? Jesus shows us that God has gotten us into forgiving our enemies, (forgiving is not the same as accepting or condoning harmful and abusive behaviour),

God has gotten us into feeding those who are hungry, visiting those who are lonely, affirming and welcoming those whom society rejects, befriending those who are marginalized, listening for the voices of those rendered voiceless, being a companion of the poor, abandoning our search for success and power in order to find our identity as a child of God, trusting that when all hope seems to have left our life, God is still in our life...

and trusting that this is still God’s world! That’s not always easy to believe. In 2020, most of our lives got abruptly interrupted by COVID-19 – our plans, our expectations, our daily routines, our work, our studies, our everything – life as we knew it has not been the life we have been living this year.

Even when we begin to return to ‘normal’, many people will bear personal griefs and economic scars from this year.

Even though Simeon and Anna celebrated the birth of the one they expected to save the world, to redeem the world, to reveal the world as God’s world – the life of this child would be a dance of joy and suffering.

Jesus would see the lame walk and the hungry fed. Jesus would also feel the deep wound of betrayal and be executed by a militarily powerful empire.

To speak of the kingdom of God does not mean that God reclines on a throne watching all of God’s people living in a continuous state of happiness and satisfaction.

To speak of the kingdom means that God somehow experiences the pains and sufferings and betrayals that God's people experience. It means that this world exists in God and that God exists in this world, and so, no matter what we are experiencing, we are experiencing it within the heart of God.

It means that the God spirit of forgiveness, healing, welcome and love that is embodied in Jesus is active in this world, that new life and new creation and new hope are seeded in life, and are growing in God's time, and light and love will emerge and shine.

As we leave the Christmas story of Jesus' birth, as we prepare to enter the year 2021, we do so still being an Advent people, an expectant people:

people trusting that God journeys with us into a new year; that God will be in this year that we enter, and that the new year that God is getting us into is a new year of God's love, a new year of sharing God's love.

We head into 2021, trusting that God is with us in today's situations, and that God will be with us in and through whatever situations we will encounter in the new year. Whatever we may get into, whatever God may get us into, God will be with us.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN