

# Candle light, Starlight, Divine Light

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 24 December 2018

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Dr Margaret Mayman

Christmas Eve

Isaiah 9:2-7; Gospel: Luke 2:1-20; Contemporary Reading:  
*“How the Light Comes”* by Jan Richardson

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <http://www.pittstreetuniting.org.au/> under “Sunday Gatherings” tab

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On Christmas Eve, we gather in darkness, our path lit by candlelight, starlight and divine light.

And in this darkness, as people have done since the dawn of creation, we tell stories.

The Indian mystic, Anthony de Mello, said that the shortest distance between humanity and the truth is a story. Tonight, as we re-tell the ancient story of the birth of Jesus, the story of Mary and Joseph, of an over-worked innkeeper, exuberant angels and anxious shepherds, the story of heaven touching earth, we allow this story to connect to our own stories, moving us to a deeper understanding of who we are, revealing truths we treasure in one another and in creation.

The stories of Isaiah and Luke, and the poetry of Jan Richardson, illumine our way as seekers in the night.

The prophecy of Isaiah tells of the light that will come not in a warrior king but in a little child: a child who will epitomise peace, who will lead not by violence or domination, but whose reign will be established and made secure in justice and in integrity.

(Siren sounds outside). And the life of the city goes on around us as we tell these stories – and we think of whoever is affected by that siren on this night.

Isaiah’s story shaped the stories, shaped the longings, of Jesus’ people through the generations.

In the story of Jesus’ birth told in Luke’s gospel, the writer casts a mystical tale of the birth of such a child: an outsider, born in poverty, a long way from home...and yet around the birth of the child is light in the darkness. Proclaiming the child’s birth, the angels encountered shepherds in the field, shepherds who were nobodies from nowhere important, and the glory of God shone around them.

Jan Richardson's poem, "*Where the Light Comes*" uses imagery that draws on the science of light – light more ancient than imagining, light that travels across astounding expanse to reach us...

In the birth of Jesus, the Divine light seeks 'what is hidden, what is lost and forgotten, in peril or in pain,' in our world and in ourselves.

In the birth of Jesus, the Divine Light blesses bodies, embraces our embodied-ness in all its shared materiality and in all its glorious diversity of shapes and colours, genders, sexualities, and abilities.

As the starlight of Bethlehem reached through the stable door and touched the skin of the baby Jesus, it seeks us too...so that we may let receive light and reflect it, so it may radiate from us: from our eyes looking at the world with kindness, from our hands transforming the world for justice, from our hearts loving the world God loves.

The coming of the light does not depend on our efforts, only on our openness. It comes as a blessing when we lift our faces, when we 'bend our bodies toward the arc that it makes.'

In the birth of Jesus, we discover a life that embodies the essence of what life itself is all about. The God we meet in Jesus is not some otherworldly creature. The Divine Presence we meet in Jesus is the primal life force that surges through all living things. The Christian story affirms that this life force came to self-consciousness in human life and was somehow uniquely seen in the fullness of Jesus. The power of the Sacred that we meet in Jesus is expressed as the power of love that expands our levels of consciousness and into which we grow as we become more deeply and more fully human.

In Jesus we meet a brother, a friend, who is at one with our God, who embodies the Love of God, who inspires justice and peace among the peoples of God. In Jesus we see a life fully lived.

Even though he was hated, rejected, betrayed, and killed on a cross, the light within him could not be extinguished.

Jesus' friends, women, men and children were touched by the power of divine light in him, and they were made whole in the power of freedom and becoming, as they embraced eternal life here and now.

After his death, they became agents of that same power, sharing its gifts from generation to generation, creating and re-creating, transforming, redeeming and making all things new.

In the telling of this story over the years after Jesus lived and died, the mundane words of narrative and fact were so inadequate that his community shifted into poetry and myth, into story and song.

And because we too cannot reduce what we know to doctrine or dogma, we tell the story that they told - of a child born in a stable, laid in a manger, recognised by animals, and outsiders and odd bods who gathered around him – and recognised him - as Emmanuel, God with us.

On this holy night, may your life story be entwined with this sacred story so that in your life the Divine may dwell, living and breathing, in and with, and through you, in the power of Love extended to all people, and to our planet home.

Let us proclaim our hopes for the liberation of humankind;

hopes of justice;

hopes of peace;

hopes of human dignity;

hopes of deep care and sustainability for the earth.

And let us proclaim that these hopes are meant for this earth and this history!

And let us affirm with joy and faith, and with courage,

the coming of Light and Love into the world

at Christmas.

Blessed be.