

Homily – We rejoice in your presence (Christmas)

What a wonderful story that is to recall. It is a story - the greatest story- of Joy – the greatest Joy. We perhaps cannot even grasp how significant it was for the people of Israel . A people who had been living in the darkness of oppression and poverty were to see a great light. So tonight, we might ask, What does it mean for us to contemplate that God became present in the person of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah foretold that we would rejoice in the presence of the child who was born for us. He would make our gladness great. He would make our Joy increase.

Some of you know, that my wife Lynne and I have two sons in the Army. Tonight , both of them are deployed overseas. In fact, for our eldest son Michael, this will be the sixth Christmas that he has away from us on operations . Last year, Michael had started a new mission in Timor, and so, as we had in the past, we packed up and sent presents to him well in advance of Christmas. In the week before Christmas, we received some presents from him in the mail. But on Christmas eve, we got a surprise knock on the door and it was Michael himself , present with us. Even though we had a great stack of presents under our Christmas tree, his presence was the most wonderful present, we could receive. Can you imagine what great joy , there was in our house, for him to be with us.

Far more significant than that story, is the story of God becoming present to us in the person of Jesus, - ^ Emmanuel – God is with us . I've been to the place where is believed that the shepherds, had that experience of an angel bringing them the news of great joy – a joy that they were to share with all people. As I looked from the Shepherds fields, up to the town of Bethlehem, I contemplated the heavenly Host praising God and singing- Glory to God in the highest heaven - and peace to all people who enjoy his favour. And yes, I could imagine, what joy those shepherds, might have experienced, and what excitement they might have shared with others, upon seeing the baby Jesus in person.

I'm hoping that all of us here will experience something of the presence of Jesus with us tonight. For he is with us. His presence is in the midst of us. He is present, through his Word in the Scriptures. He is present on excellence, in the Eucharistic meal, we will share tonight , and he is present in the midst of our gathering, as he delights to see us come together as his people .

Jesus doesnt come just once a year to give us Christmas presents and he doesn't come just to give us a feeling of joy.

He came and he comes, because he was sent by God on a mission -to bring God's people together, that they might transform the world. In its simplest form it was a mission to encourage people to actively love God, to nurture relationships with each other and more specifically, to love their neighbors, especially those who were in need - the poor, the sick, the lonely, the troubled.

I'm conscious that tonight there a number of people here , who haven't been present here in our community for a while, or maybe haven't been present here before, at all. Firstly, I want you to know that you are very welcome. Your presence with us, makes a

difference. Your presence with us is itself a present to us. We are poorer without your presence. But I want to tell you what we have been doing about that mission of God .

I want you to know also that we as a community have been continuing to grow and develop more into the image of the people of God, that Jesus desires. Through years of discernment as a parish of the local church of Brisbane we have developed a vision and a theology summed up in the words- Jesus- Communion - Mission. Week to week through our worship and our ministry groups, we have been getting to know **Jesus** better, we've been listening to his teaching, and personally trying to live out the life that he preached about. We have been growing in the **Communion**, the relationships, the friendships and Partnerships, that he preached about - as being an essential part of the Christian life. United in communion with Jesus and with each other, We have been proactively been living out his mission to make the world a better place. We have many ministry groups that reach out to the poor and the sick and lonely in the parish area. We are particularly concerned to support and nurture the youth in our parish and state schools. And we have extended ourselves by supporting the people in the South Pacific, Sri Lanka and Timor. We have tried to bring Christ's presence to many different people and places and we will continue to joyfully do that.

But we would do it better if we had Your presence with us on a more regular basis. Just look at the mass of people around you . What an awesome gathering of God's people. I get excited just thinking of the potential that we as a community would have if we had the horsepower, of all of you gathered here tonight, engaged in some of the missions that we are undertaking. We are already making the world a better place., but we would do an extraordinary better job with your participation. Even in just one missional area.

To those of you who are regularly present here with us, we thank you. God delights in your faithfulness and service. God delights in being present with us. God delights in seeing us gathered here tonight. God reaches out his arms to us tonight and says I love you. I care for you, I want to be present to you. I want you to know that you have my presence with you wherever you go on my mission. Come back to me with all your heart . Together, we are making the world a better place.

Let us rejoice in God's presence among us tonight. As God rejoices in our presence with each other. May we continue to gather as God's people on a regular basis.

Do you think that's Good news – tell the person beside you- being present with you is God's gift to me tonight.