

## 2020 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The world Joseph and Mary lived in was a violent one. The dominant Roman culture was cruel in enforcing its laws. In Israel there were no heroic leaders opposing them; just the morally degenerate King Herod ingratiating himself to them and in turn exploiting his people with exorbitant taxes.

The righteous of Israel- people like Joseph and Mary, Zechariah and Elizabeth- called out to God- imploring Him to come and to set things straight in their twisted and deformed world.

The visit of the Archangel Gabriel was in answer to this prayer. Gabriel appeared to a devout Jewish woman named Mary who from the first moment of her existence had lived in God's Presence. So deep was her yearning for the coming of the Messiah and so open was she to God's Will that she responded immediately with a heartfelt 'Yes' to the Angel's invitation to be the mother of the longed-for Messiah. She knew her call would involve much suffering but put her freedom, her whole person, at the service of God's plan. She thereby set in motion the mighty action which would bring redemption not only to Israel but to people of all ages.

Mary was chosen by God not only because of her holiness but also because of her powerlessness. Jesus, her Divine Son, came with a special love and concern for those who were oppressed and suffering. In the first Reading God reacted against King David's proposal to build a lavish Jewish Temple to house the Ark of the Covenant- the symbol of God's presence among His People. Instead God stated His preference for the Ark of the Covenant to remain in a humble tent out in the desert. God didn't want to be barricaded away from the powerless. There would be no locked doors or walls in the stable when Jesus came to be born.

The Church which Jesus founded has been called to continue His work, battling against the darkness of paganism, materialism and hedonism.

There is much to do in New Zealand. There is so much darkness in our country. The darkness of the disintegration of marriage as an institution; the darkness of poisonous hatreds and racial tensions; the darkness of sexual abuse; the darkness of confusion about important moral and life issues. And like the Romans of old we in New Zealand live addicted to games and worship at the altar of sport. Even for regular Mass-goers, if the choice is between coming to Mass on a Sunday or participating in a game of Bowls, it is a no-contest.

The thought which used to comfort me was that at least one day a year, at Christmas time, people remembered Christ. But now I have to ask, “Do they?”

I challenge you to buy a Christmas Card with a Nativity scene in the majority of our Stationery shops. Most Cards are adorned with beach scenes, pictures of pohutukawa trees or jolly Santa’s and the words “Seasons Greetings” without even a mention of “Christmas”. A Parishioner told me on Thursday that at one stationery shop he was able to buy some Christmas Cards showing Nativity scenes on them- all selling at half price. Why? Because no one else was buying them.

Christmas, in New Zealand, is struggling as a religious festival. At best it can be seen as a celebration of family life.

Let our Advent prayer be “Come, Lord Jesus. Come to us once again this Christmas. Come dispel the darkness which surrounds us here in our beloved country. Lead us into light.”

Like Mary in today’s Gospel we are challenged to say ‘Yes’ to God’s request that we bring Christ to birth this Christmas.

Be brave. Be counter-cultural! Put a Christmas star in a window of your house. Construct a manger scene and put it in your lounge. Encourage your families and friends to join with you at Christmas Mass to celebrate together the dawning of the Light sent to conquer the spiritual darkness which surrounds us.

Encourage your family to come for a precious hour to reflect upon the sheer enormity of how God- the Eternal One- became a human Person to be with us in our battle against darkness and sin.

Come with your family and your friends. Celebrate together the birth of our Saviour.

Sing in exultation. O Come let us adore Him.