

Be born in us today
Christmas Day 25 Dec 2017
Revd Jenny Wilkens
Isaiah 52:7-10; Heb 1:1-12
John 1:1-14

http://www.stlukesinthecity.org.nz/sermons_pid_22.html



One of the special Christmas traditions is getting out the crib scene and setting it up, as we have most beautifully here.

I have several nativity scenes that I have been given over the years, and of course each one has connections with people and different homes and churches where they have been set up.

I've brought along just a couple of mine – first one that is very small and came from **Spain** with silver figures of Mary, Joseph and the Christ child, and an ox and my favourite donkey – it comes from being a Jenny!

Another is a bigger one that hails from **Peru**, with the Andes in the background, a peasant Mary and Joseph with the baby in the manger, an ox and sheep looking on, a cactus growing in the corner of the house and a lovely little vegetable garden. A reminder of the peasant home of the holy family, a reminder that God in Christ came into an earthly home, and into the realities of daily life and survival. You can also put a candle inside this house to light it up in the evening.

I was delighted to see this year that our Bishop Victoria included a **Tongan** nativity scene in her Christmas greeting to the Diocese. A Joseph wearing tapa cloth, Mary and another woman looking suspiciously like sisters of the Community of the Sacred Name, and in front of the manger, not a lamb but a pig. There's something rather lovely about the idea of the Piglet of God! I'm just hoping it wasn't heading for Christmas dinner!

Of course this year the nativity scene that has been circulating at high speed on the internet is one that some in our world would be quite keen to foster. It shows a nativity scene **without Jews or Arabs or Africans or refugees!** And of course all that remains in the scene are the donkey, cow and sheep, not even the Jewish baby Jesus, let alone Jewish shepherds or magi of Arab or African descent. A salutary reminder too of Matthew's story of the holy family so soon becoming refugees fleeing to Egypt from the wrath of a rival King Herod. Still today Egyptian Christians are proud to claim that the child Jesus sheltered in Egypt – out of Egypt I have called my Son (Hosea 11:1, Mt 2:15). And a reminder too not to forget the refugees of our world through our CWS Christmas appeal or our own hospitality to those in our midst through the year.

I have come across another couple of nativity scenes that spoke to me and maybe will to you too.

The first is another from South America, this time **Bolivia**, and is made within a **cracked clay pot**. If you look closely you can see that Mary has her chin cupped in her hand and looks frankly exhausted. Joseph has his hands over his ears, the baby is grimacing and definitely not keeping to the 'no crying he makes' rule and the sheep are baaing, joining in the cacophony as well.

This cracked pot reminds me of life in the real world, both for the holy family, who made do with a draughty stable or more likely cave, midst the noise and smell and dung of the animals. And our homes which can often feel at Christmas time a bit of a shambles, with not everything ready for Christmas, with still a few cracks in the walls post-quakes, with bits not tidied up or that we haven't got round to cleaning. And it can be the same with our own lives too – the good intentions of the preparatory season of Advent caving in to rather too many end of year and Christmas events, the exhaustion and what have I left off the 'to buy' or 'to do' list, the lost keys and lost tempers, frayed nerves and short fuses...

I know we have some Leonard Cohen fans here, and this nativity scene reminds me of a line from his Anthem: 'Ring the bells that still can ring, forget your perfect offering, there is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in'. That's how the light gets **in**, but it's also how the light gets **out**, perhaps through our cracks, and through our wrinkles and laughter lines....I always find great comfort in 2 Corinthians 4:7 *"But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us"*.

Another very small nativity scene I love comes from **Italy** and is inside a **coffee cup** – the Italians being great lovers of coffee! But it reminds me that 'God with us – Emmanuel' can be shared every time we share a cup of coffee with someone. Where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Mt 18:20), and that can happen here or over the road at one of the cafés on Victoria St.

The final part of a crib scene I want to leave with you today is one you can hold in your hand. It is an **olive wood Madonna and child** that I brought back from **Bethlehem**, it's been a bit knocked around by falling of a shelf in one of the quakes but it reminds me Christ came to share in our life, all of it. And that in the miracle of Christmas, and in response to Mary's yes to God, God's own life was put in our hands to treasure or to do what we will with. Each of us weighs up in our hands what we will do with the life and love of God offered to us in Christ Jesus. Christmas gives us the opportunity to take the infant Christ in our hands and to pray, 'enter in, be born in us today'.



Spanish nativity scene



Peruvian Holy Family



"A nativity scene without Jews, Arabs, Africans or refugees."
imgur.com



Tongan nativity plus pig



Bolivia - cracked pot
with thanks to Sheila Pritchard for her Bolivian and Italian nativities, and to Bishop Victoria for the Tongan nativity.



Italy - coffee cup



Olive wood
Madonna
& child
from
Bethlehem