

CHRISTMAS 9pm, Midnight

Year C.

It won't come as any Christmas surprise to say that everyone here was born of particular parents, in a particular place on the map, and at a particular time in history. All of these things say something about who we are and they give us a sense of belonging. No. 42 Bealiba Road South Caulfield probably doesn't mean much to any of you but it's pretty significant for me because it's where I spent my childhood. (Mind you, they do say you should never "go back"..... I went looking for No. 42 a couple of years ago only to find that they'd demolished the place and it is now a swimming pool.)

It's funny how when people want to ask us who we are, the question often comes: "Where are you from?" Perhaps it's because the *land* we come from offers the first clue to others of our hidden identity. They're probably trying to guess our age as well. It's as if people need to register us in place and in time before they can really grow to know us and accept us.

Perhaps the same is true of God: perhaps he must register himself in place and in time before we can grow to know him and love him.

At the center of Christianity is the great proclamation of the identity of Jesus: that he is not only the son of Mary but that he is the Son of God; that he is not only the prophet from Nazareth, but that he is Christ the Lord. That proclamation was made by the early Church only after the resurrection when the apostles came to see in the power of the spirit the full truth about Jesus. It was that great truth which inspired the writing of the four Gospels, which are great testimonies to the person of Jesus.

So the Gospels – written after the Resurrection – take us back in time to the beginnings of Jesus' life to see there *more* than obscurity but the beginnings of greatness; to see with the eyes of faith the *significance* of this child. And tonight we hear the most memorable and poetic of these testimonies from Luke: the celebration of the truth that at his birth Jesus is saviour of us all.

In his story Luke registers the birth of Jesus at a particular time in history and on a particular place on the map. He is a Palestinian Jew, born in the reign of Caesar Augustus and King Herod, born in a place called Bethlehem.

So the birth of Jesus is located in space and in time, the natural boundaries of every human life-story. "Once upon a time" is fairytale time: "the reign

of Augustus” is real time. Luke registers the birth of Jesus as a sign of the historical reality of the visit of God, and a witness to the fulfillment of God’s plan.

Tonight / today we celebrate the love of God which shows itself in the fragile bundle of the child Jesus. Perhaps it is true to say that we can love only what we can get our arms around. To love we need a particular name, a particular face, a particular person. And we have God’s particulars in Jesus. When we look at Jesus we no longer have to guess at God. And, like Mary and Joseph, we can all get our arms around the child from Bethlehem.

Of course the baby grew up. He is the one who will show us how close God is, who will teach us to call God “Abba” (Father) and who will die to prove the measure of God’s love for us.

The Gospel invites us to take the child with us. Not to drop him back in the crib when we leave here, but to welcome into our hearts the gift of God in Jesus. In Jesus we have the sure proof that God loves us, and we all need to live in the assurance of that love. The great truth of Christmas is that no matter what happens to us, God’s love is not negotiable. It is never in doubt. So, tonight / today let us celebrate that love which proclaims: “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” And the name of that love is Jesus.