Hope, Trust and Love

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Christmas Eve: Luke 2 1-14

Welcome home: it's lovely to see you! We have serious things to consider together.

Somewhere in the world's many camps and refuges for displaced persons, babies will be born tonight. Turkey, Bangladesh, Somalia, Bethlehem, Mount Barker, take your pick. As the labour-pains intensify, the baby's mother wills them to stop: 'Not now; not yet! This is not the world I wanted for you!' Everyone around her may be filled with the same dismay, they too may be telling God, 'No, not now; not yet!' But as those matter-of-fact midwives are so apt to tell us, 'Whatever happens my dear, that baby is going to be born.'

It's all too true; whatever the conditions on the outside, babies are born. They're not going to stop for anyone or anything. It's as if they're telling us:

'Here I come, ready or not. And if you don't think you have that world outside ready for me, you should have! So let me place that order once more. When I get out, I need one promising future, one safe environment, lots of good food and a loving family and community. Got all that?! Now you've got fifteen minutes to get it organised, because here I come!'

We know many babies won't get any of those good things. We could despair at it all; tell ourselves there's nothing we can do about it. But the birth of Jesus, a child of displaced parents in a country under occupation tells us to think differently. Christmas demands a change of perspective from us. Christmas demands that we see the birth of any child as a defiant word from God — a defiant assertion of hope even where we can see nothing to hope for; a defiant assertion of God's

trust in humanity, even where we think people have betrayed every value; a defiant assertion of love, even where we think love probably can't change anything.

A new life is a word of hope that God speaks to the world; a word of trust that God speaks to the world. And a baby is *patently* a person that God loves.

Nothing's changed. We might feel like giving up, but God won't. As long as the sun shines and the rain falls on everyone alike, God will give babies to be born to us regardless of our circumstances. *We* might focus on the tragedy of a birth in a refugee camp; of a complex birth where the treatment is beyond the parents' means. *We* might ask God why this is allowed to happen. But I believe the only answer we'll get to that question is silence; the most eloquent answer of all.

God isn't going to waste time answering a question like that, because God is busy with the baby as it's born. People often ask where God is when all the catastrophes and suffering of the world are happening. Tonight's birth of a child; this child of displaced parents in Bethlehem is God's answer. This baby's birth tells us that God is right in the thick of the world's catastrophes and suffering; God is there, crying out with all the defiant, self-righteousness of a baby who deserves to be loved and comforted; who deserves to be born in the safety of their own community.

This baby born in Bethlehem tells us that God will never listen to our time-wasting questions. God is too busy enduring the injustice, and incredibly, trusting us; trusting us to step up to the mark straight away and care for the vulnerable and the weak. God is so determined that we will come good that God becomes one of us; God becomes that vulnerable, weak baby Jesus – and every other new life like him, and trusts us to offer care and hope! So in a world where so many millions are born into such circumstances, we can hear, in this account of

Jesus's birth, a story which changes our perspective on all of them; a story which brings a word of hope in a cry for justice. Where is God? Tonight, God has met us, born as a human child.

If God is, indeed, born in the infant Jesus, his birth is a defiant word which confronts things that we seem to accept as inevitable for ourselves and many of our fellow creatures. His birth confronts the fact that we live in a world plagued with poverty and hunger, oppression and warfare, genocide and environmental destruction.

This baby — and through him every baby — is God's word of truth to us that such evils are not inevitable. They can be confronted — and not with fearful caution, but with the reckless kind of hope that sends a baby to be born into a land under military occupation. God is not a pragmatist. God's silence only echoes our own.

We must confront the evils and injustices of our world because that child's birthright was to receive the love of God through the nurture of others; not to suffer and die at the whim of some distant political power. Every child, every animal or bird or reptile that is born, every plant that sprouts is a word from God which says what should be. We were each born as a sign of hope and truth. Our calling is to realise this through the respect and love we share with all created things.

We have shared this hope, this truth and this love tonight. The golden flame of the Christ Candle at the centre of the Advent Wreath — at the centre of our waiting — its warmth spread among us at our gathering; spread among us as a sign of hope which defies despair; spread among us as the torch of trust which God has cherished for each of us as babies, and still cherishes for us now.

Tonight, we have shared this hope, this trust and this love through the symbol of candlelight, through song, and through

listening for God's voice. Tonight when we go out, we do so with the purpose of living out this hope, this trust and this love.

This baby is God's defiant assertion that hope *will* spring up where we expect to see none; this baby is God's assertion that trust *will* live even where deception protects injustice; and this baby incontrovertibly speaks God's love to each of us — incontrovertibly demands that we love each other — because since that birth, we've known for sure that every atom of our being — and of every created being — is charged with the divine love of the God who became one of us. That's where God is; God is with us — Emmanuel. That's what we gather to celebrate tonight.

Amen