

Advent 1 30 November 2008 Jenny Dawson

Isaiah 64: 1-9 1 Corinthians 1: 3-9 Mark 13: 24-37

The Kingdom comes... as surely as Christmas!

Advent Sunday, Whole Parish Service with launch of CWS Appeal and Foyer Appeal, and Baptism of Rosamond Bell

Every year I am reminded again of the saying "the Kingdom is coming as surely as Christmas". This year, despite the Christmas carols already pursuing shoppers around the mall, let's put much more emphasis on the Kingdom!

Just a warning though: you might be here this morning under false pretences: this day we call Advent Sunday is not about preparing for Christmas. It is known as "the beginning of the church's year" because it is the start of the time when we start to look again for the coming of Jesus Christ. Through the next twelve months we will follow his life and death and living again. That is about much more than a baby on Christmas Day. The baby was perhaps the greatest but definitely just the first of many signs of the kingdom that God wants to bring in everywhere for everyone. Yet we would not be here without babies! This morning we are strongly reminded of that kingdom as we baptise a baby, Rosamund Bell, into it.

She is a sermon in herself. The American poet Carl Sandburg said, "A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on." Babies learn from their mistakes and successes. We do too. As a parish, what can we learn from what we have done over the past four years? My Vicar's reports for these four years show what we have been doing together.

Think back to 2004: The Pauatahanui Parish Centre here was opened in September, the third Lord of the Rings film "Return of the King" won 11 Oscars, in elections – Porirua's Mayor Jenny Brash was chosen for a second time, there was another American election which began President Bush's 2nd term, and a new vicar began ministry with the people here. Thank you for exactly four years together. I have here the Vicar's Reports that tell of what we have done in that time.

Sometimes it's good to look back to go forward. Our Bible readings always help us to do that. This morning's readings call us back to our core business. At the time Jesus was born, people had been longing for centuries for God to act on behalf of the poor and broken. Remember Isaiah's words.

God still acts in and with and amongst the poor. We support Christian World Service not just because they help those who need it. They also listen to the poor – so each week in Advent we "meet a partner", today people in Timor Leste (the former East Timor) tell us how they are signs of God's kingdom. They invite our support. Last year our parish people gave a total of \$1754.90 This year's theme is "Keep Hope Alive" – help us do it by using the envelopes!

Then we heard how Paul assured the Corinthians that God would continue to be with faithful people as they lived in deep trust awaiting the coming again of Jesus.

Faithful people here in Plimmerton need a better space to meet and greet those who come to worship here. The Foyer we are planning to build will also be a sign of God's Kingdom: saying to anyone who will look that our God is about space and openness and generous welcome. What better sign could we have!

And that great dramatic Gospel reading reminded us not to get overwhelmed by what's going on around us but to keep looking, keep watching, for new signs, new indications that God is at work, living and loving everyone everywhere.

You are invited to commit yourself to being part of that hospitable love this morning by offering to host Jesus – just for a night. The Travelling Crib or Posada is available for you to have at home over this Advent period: not just for families or children but anyone who is willing to receive a basket...It contains a nativity set that has been lent by a parishioner, some books from our parish library, some prayers, and a candle – all for you to set up in your home to remember what this season is all about. The next day you pass to someone else, a sign that we are one parish where everyone can simply share in the journey together.

So Happy New Year! Each time you see or hear or smell or touch or taste anything at all about Christmas over the next few weeks just remind yourself, "the Kingdom is coming as surely as Christmas" and look for all the signs of God's Kingdom that are breaking in, calling for our energy and passion so that God can do what God is longing to do. You are invited to be part of it.

Blessing of the Travelling Crib

Loving God, bless this crib so that all who offer hospitality to the nativity figures may also make room for Jesus in our hearts, homes and communities. As we prepare to welcome the holy birth, give us grace to seek you in our lives every day, and all people receive the fullness of life he came to bring. So we travel in spirit with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, in Jesus's name, Amen.