

# Metropolitan Community Church, Sydney with Pitt Street Uniting Church

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Tuesday 17 December 2024

Welcome to the divinity reveal party:  
A Reflection by Rev Dr Josephine Inkpin

Christmas Eve

A Contemporary Reading from *Prayers and Readings for Worship*, vol. 2 by  
Lois Braby; A Christmas Eve Dramatic Reading

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

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Something is missing here. What do you think it is?

I mean, I have been involved in these Christmas Eve gigs for a long time.

I'm sure there is something I was typically aware of, on Christmas Eve, in the first years of my ministry, which we don't see around us here...

Well, I did begin my ministry in England, so, is it the lack of cold and winter darkness?

No.

Those things aren't necessary, are they, to celebrate Christmas. We have enough political and other human coldness, and darkness in our lives and world, still to need to open ourselves to the spiritual light of Christmas.

So, what is it that we are missing?

Is it perhaps patriarchy, homo and trans phobia?

We had a fair amount of those kinds of things in Churches years ago, and, to be fair, they still hang about, like the ghosts of Christmas past, even in some places today?

No! That is not it, is it!

I think we can say, with confidence, that those ghosts have long since been cast away from this place, anyway.

Like the Christmas angels, we are called to share much more loving and lively songs.

And we certainly have some wonderful singers with us tonight, together with all kinds of other familiar Christmas Eve features.

So, what is it that is missing?

Is it a Christmas tree? No, it is not a Christmas tree, though we are getting closer there.

I am actually thinking of a nativity set, or crib - or, at least, an obvious, visible, crib.

You know what I mean: a nativity scene, with a representation of a stable: with Mary and Joseph, shepherds, animals, and straw on the floor.

We do, of course, have angels above us – our queer angels of compassion, courage, and joy, from our World Pride celebrations – but not some of the rest of that traditional nativity scene.

Or do we? Are we missing something in that way? A St Francis style nativity set?

Well, they can be lovely, but I am not sure, actually, that having such a traditional nativity scene really matters.

Indeed, it may be that we are better off without one, because, in having one, we can sometimes miss the original point of the crib.

That can then be a bit of an irony actually.

For it was Saint Francis of Assisi who effectively created the crib as a visible nativity scene as a way of shaking up rather worn out and traditional ideas of the birth of Christ in his own day.

In his day, the crib as a visible nativity scene was kind of revolutionary. St Francis was trying to help us see how radical and extraordinary the Christ story originally was.

However, today, many visible nativity scenes can seem a little bit staid, obvious, and ordinary. For Church traditions often have a way of dulling down the extraordinariness, and the radical meaning, of the birth of Christ, don't they?

If we are not careful, we can easily turn Mary, Joseph, and child into a somewhat simplistic plaster cast model of a conventional family – when they far from that.

The Magi – literally the 'magic' people – were also originally intended to speak of strangers, diversity of culture and belief, and crossing boundaries. But they are easily changed into kings, with wealth and power different from ordinary people.

The shepherds also above all represent down-to-earth poor people but they can also seem remote to us, especially city folk. And the animals, for St Francis, represent the whole of Creation, not just the odd domesticated animal.

Meanwhile, in many nativity sets, the angels, the queerest figures of all, often disappear altogether.

For how do we picture the subversion, the magic, the down-to-earth extraordinariness, the divine queerness and mystery of the birth of Christ?

The divine queerness and mystery of God: that is the real gift of Christmas, isn't it?

For we are invited into seeing ourselves, and our world, and God, afresh.

You know, I sometimes think that some Christmas renderings are a bit like those so-called '*gender reveal*' parties – based on a lot of nonsense and seeking to bring false order and meaning to our vastly more interesting lives, bodies, and worlds.

Instead, Christmas, I think, is much better to be understood as a '*divinity reveal*' party, breaking open new ways of seeing and valuing ourselves and our world, and a deeper and more loving picture of God within it all.

A 'divinity reveal' party: that is what the Christmas stories in the Bible are all about.

They are not so much speaking about the history of Jesus as they are of the meaning of Jesus.

After all, they were written down much later than other parts of the Gospels in order to point to what the rest of the story of Jesus was all about: the revelation of the extraordinariness of God in the midst of all our human struggles, including in our very bodies and all that they involve.

They reveal the God of love so that we can know that divine love, and strength, and joy, in our lives too, whoever we are.

That is why the figures in the story are all marginal, outsider, even queer, people: because the Gospel writers are trying to tell us that that is where we will find God revealed.

Even the location of Jesus' birth is deeply symbolic of that, transforming what is called trash back into treasure. Indeed, I remember one year, in Toowoomba, on Christmas Eve, putting a large dustbin, a trash can, in the very heart of the church building, and placing the baby Jesus figure on top.

That caused a little bit of a stir!

It helped however to remind us that that revealing God in what is often termed trash is the point of the Christmas stories.

The Gospel writers go on to tell us that Jesus was killed on a rubbish heap, by the established law and colonial powers, outside the city walls. For God is always there, where unjust suffering and exclusion is taking place, bringing hope and redemption through the power of eternal love.

The birth stories of Jesus therefore symbolise that. It is the very fleshly, unwed, morally dubious, woman who carries God.

It is the poor workers in the fields who respond to the messengers of God.

It is the magical migrants and queer pagans from the East who recognise God.

It is the marginalised neighbourhood which is the birthplace of God.

It is the food trough of the animals, lower even than the lowest of human beings, which is the cot of God.

It is in these, the Gospel writers are telling us, that God is revealed.

For divinity is always revealing itself in those people and places the world generally disdains and rejects: God is always being birthed in and among that which is wrongly marginalised and oppressed.

So, actually, we don't really need a traditional crib, a nativity set, here, in that sense, do we? For divinity revealing is going on all the time and all over the place, if we would see it.

Our Christmas divinity reveal party doesn't depend on any of the details of the Christmas story but on knowing its meaning, in our hearts and in our lives.

For, do we know that every one of us, and every bit of us, and every place where we live, is loved by God?

Do we know that that is where God is birthed and able to be nurtured?

Do we know that, whoever we are, and whatever our circumstances, the God of love is with us?

Each and every one of us is welcome at the Christmas divinity reveal party and each of us is invited to share that spirit into the future, revealing more of God and partying in love wherever we go.

For, if we want to have a nativity set, all we need to do is to look around us, and at ourselves.

And we need to look at where people are marginalised and suffering today: for where we see the homeless and the poor, the displaced and the marginalised, and the needs of animals and the wider Creation, there God is being born again.

In the hope, peace, and joy of embodied love: not trash but treasure.

Amen.