

Underdog Christmas Nick Mountfort Christmas Day 2016

Reading: Luke 2:8-20

(It's wonderful to welcome Sally into the family of God through baptism today.)

By any measure, the first Christmas was a public relations disaster. It couldn't have been managed much worse. None of the important people were there. There was no Roman emperor or Greek philosopher, not even an oracle. Instead there were a bunch of shepherds, a carpenter and his fiancée. To top it off, Jesus wasn't born in one of the great centres of learning like Rome or Athens, he was born in *Loserville*.

Luke's Gospel that we read this morning is very much the Gospel of the underdog. The first to hear the good news of Jesus birth are poor shepherds. The scene is set then for a public relations disaster. Jesus is born in the wrong place, to the wrong bunch, at the wrong time.

But God's ways are not our ways, and this is never as true as at Christmas.

What should have been a flop turns out to be the most talked about birth in all of human history. Never in all of history has the birth of one person changed the lives of so many.

And yet, think for a moment. Jesus was not known outside his tiny homeland until after Easter. He conquered no armies, he wrote no books, he built no monuments, he was not financially, or artistically successful and he wielded no political power.

But no life has had so much impact. We can be dazzled by the statistics. Six billion Bibles have been published, over a quarter of the world's population worship this Child born today - even our calendar is based on his birth.

Nothing it seems compares to the transforming power of love. Esther is one such life transformed by Christmas love. She grew up in Bangalore, India. It is a place of great beauty but also of grinding poverty.

Her family were suffering from heavy debts incurred by her two older sisters' dowries when their small business collapsed, leaving the family in dire straits.

However, at the age of five, a Lower Hutt Christian family began sponsoring her. Their compassion for her need, slowly transformed her life. She was able to go to primary and secondary school and then she trained as a nurse, graduating with a Bachelor of Nursing in 2008.

A high flier she now works at accountants Ernst & Young as a senior associate.

To begin with, she says, she did not know what it meant to be loved by some random people she had never met. But as she grew older, she learned of the sacrifices her Upper Hutt family were making - for her.

"It really touched me." she said, "The letters they wrote were so inspiring and it was so encouraging knowing that people far away cared for me." she said.

In 2012 she was able to visit her kiwi family and thank them. Their Christian faith and sacrifice had blessed her so much that she tries to give back to the community by helping those in poverty in northern India, and by providing for her family.

Esther herself is now a Christian and is dedicated to helping the poor.

Not only has Esther been lifted out of poverty, she also has developed a passion for pavlova.

Esther's story shows what happened that first Christmas day was something that no public relations could ever have predicted. Jesus was born poor but he has made so many rich, he was born on the edge of empire but his life changed the world - through the hearts of ordinary people.

Today some very ordinary people are invited to witness the birth of Christ. I refer not the shepherds but to you and me. We might not be world famous, even in NZ, and yet Jesus comes to us again, just as he came to those simple shepherds and a frightened young couple. He comes to be born in the rough stable of our lives.

The spin doctors would have been horrified. But God got it just right that night so long ago.

Thousands of lives have been transformed by this baby who spent his first hours in an animal feed-box. And you can be one of those lives too. When you open your life to him, you discover that he is still alive and still transforming lives for the better.

Let us pray:

Jesus, you came for the underdog,

For those of little account.

Be born again in us today

And work your miracle of love.

In His name we ask it.

Amen.