

Don't be Afraid, God is with You
The Baby Still Alive Giving us Courage

25 December 2019

Reading: Luke 2:8-14

Today/tonight we gather to celebrate a birth. But why gather to celebrate a birth? After all it's a birth a long time ago in an animal feeding trough. It is a birth to a poor unmarried couple, migrant parents. To be sure babies are born every day. In fact, during the time I'm going to speak to you 2,500 children will be born into our world, although hopefully none here in church. So what is it about this birth that makes it so important anyhow?

To answer that question we need to look back on our year. Many of us are suffering from from 'disaster fatigue'. I know I am. Although it seems years ago it was only March when we faced the terrible news of 51 people gunned down here in the Deans Avenue mosque. In memory of those 51 we have since raised money to help 51 poor Afghans with micro grants to help them on their feet. But that isn't the only disaster fatiguing us. Many of us are still struggling to get our lives back together after the earthquakes. But there's good news. After a monumental effort of fundraising this will be our last midnight in the hall. Next year we'll be in the church. There have been disasters on Whakaari/White Island and bushfires in Australia and you may have had your own disasters too.

But what could an obscure birth in a distant corner of the long dead Roman empire have to say to our disaster fatigue.

Well there is one emotion that stands out in Luke's account of the birth of Jesus tonight/today and it is fear.

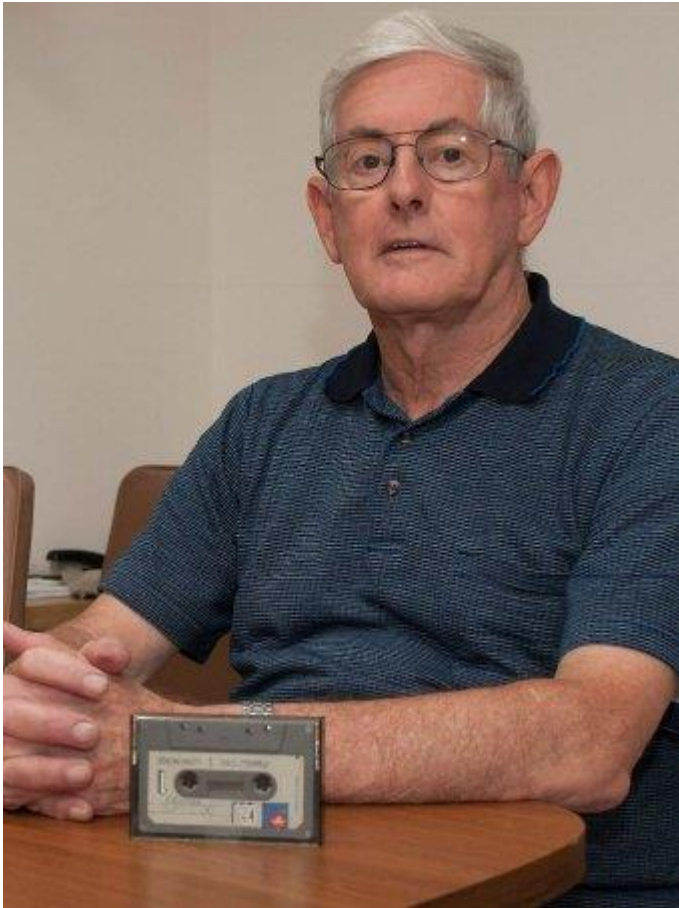
Mary is full of fear when the angel tells her she is to give birth. Joseph is fearful and initially wants to divorce Mary. The shepherds are fearful. Even the sages from the East are fearful. But to each of these people the message that God has is the same: "Do not be afraid, for I bring you news of great joy."

But it's one thing to read it and it is another to know this message right in the midst of a disaster.

On Christmas Eve in 1974 one of the worst cyclones in recorded history hit Darwin. Cyclone Tracy. David Keynes was to live through it and his brother asked him to record the event on his walkman. Remember walkmans?

His harrowing account released recently on ABC News remains chilling.

The recording begins while Tracy was still 27 kilometres away. Even that far away the winds were strong enough to bend trees right over until they broke in two.



[PHOTO: David Keynes with his taped recording of the night Cyclone Tracy hit.](#)
(ABC News)

But worse was to come. David describes the sky turning orange at about 11:15pm.

With water coming in through his roof and his windows "like a waterfall," he shouts: "The bloody house has been hit by stuff. "It is probably my car or something."

With fear growing in his voice as the cyclone becomes stronger, "The walls are shaking, the floor is shaking. Everything is moving," he said as the wind howled in the background.

"God knows what's left out there. We have lost radio contact."

He seeks refuge in the only part of his house still standing - the bathroom.

Hunger and thirst eventually set in but he described not being able to even drink water from his toilet because he had added cleaner to it.

At one point, above loud banging noises, Mr Keynes yelled: "Stop it, my God, there's no roof."

As he continued to record, everything went still, the eye of the storm was passing over. David cowering in the bathroom under a bedspread trying desperately to find solace sings the only song that can calm his fears.

Pause

Silent night, holy night!

Shepherds quake at the sight!

Glories stream from heaven afar;

Heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia!

Christ the Savior is born!

Christ the Savior is born!

Eventually the storm passed and David was left with nothing except his life. Then without anaesthetic stitched his own leg up ... as you do!

We gather today/tonight not because disasters don't happen (they most surely do), nor because we aren't fearful or even anxious. We gather because in this birth of a baby, we find courage, courage to face our fears. Courage in a God who is with.

For Jesus grew up to proclaim and live God's love like no other, and then he mysteriously rose again after his death.

This day/night gives us courage and hope because Jesus is alive with us still. In him God is with us now, not just long ago.

An unknown author writes of Jesus

If you look for me at Christmas,
you won't need a special star;
I'm no longer just in Bethlehem,
I'm right here where you are.
You may not be aware of Me
amid the celebrations.
You'll have to look beyond the stores

and all the decorations.
But if you take a moment
from your list of things to do,
and listen to your heart, you'll find
I'm waiting there for you.
You're the one I want to be with,
you're the reason that I came,
and you'll find Me in the stillness,
as I'm whispering your name.
Do not be afraid.