

# The Lord Coming to His Temple

5 December 2021

## Getting Ready for Jesus

St Luke's

Reading: Malachi 3:1-4

It's really lovely to welcome Freyja into the family of God through her baptism this morning. It wasn't that long ago that we baptised Olaf, her brother, also.

I wonder what you had to do to get the house ready for the birth of Olaf and then Freyja. When we were expecting our first child, we got one of those cots with instructions in Taiwanese. I often think I should get one of them when preparing couples for marriage. If you can assemble one late at night, while a newborn screams in the background, the mother-in-law tells you what to do and the work phone keeps ringing, your marriage can survive anything. When a newborn is coming, we often paint their room, or put-up new curtains or clean out cupboards. We make room for them.

On the very first Christmas, Mary and Joseph couldn't find a room. Like so many in our world they were displaced people - refugees. The innkeeper, if he had any inkling who was to be born, would have given up his own bed rather than sending the holy family to a lean-to out the back.

When reflecting on Jesus' birth the first Christians could see Scriptures pointing to his coming. Our first reading was one such text. Written some 3,000 year ago when the heart of the nation was the temple. Jewish people believed that it wasn't just a grand building but the home of God. Malachi foresaw a time when God would send a messenger to bring the people back to the very heart of their loving God. This messenger, we believe, was Jesus.

But there is something much more profound than Jesus coming just at the first Christmas. Mysteriously, scandalously, Scripture tells us that the Divine wants to come and take up residence in us!



Sarah Templeton is a young NZ woman who has given permission for some of her story to be told. My ambition, she writes, was to have fun, enjoy life and have the freedom to do whatever I wanted.

I was brought up in a non-Christian family and came to disbelieve in the existence of God in my late teenage years. My life revolved around partying, guys, friends, drugs, and weekends. My security and happiness came especially from alcohol and what others thought of me.

When I got to uni, I developed a drinking problem. I was getting smashed at least four times a week whether I was alone or with friends. I would often prioritize alcohol (and cigarettes) over rent.

I failed half my papers in my first year because I'd be too hung over to show up to lectures. I was insecure about my appearance and developed an eating disorder because I thought people would like me more if I was thinner.

Then, in my second year, someone from [Student Life](#) at St. David's approached me and showed me a short video on her iPod. I wasn't too keen on chatting with a Christian, but I agreed since I was just waiting for class.

There were three main points that struck me from the video:-

- 1) God loves us regardless of the bad things we do,
- 2) He's always calling each of us into a relationship with Him, and
- 3) it's up to us to make that decision to have a relationship with God.

I began asking a lot of questions and after exploring the answers I thought, "If this stuff is true, why not give a relationship with God a go? What am I going to lose? Then I'll know for sure whether it's legit and can reject or accept it accordingly."

Although I was afraid to change, I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my life in October 2008.

At first, I was anxious, thinking, "What have I gotten myself into?" But remembering how God loves me unconditionally and will never leave me helped to ease that anxiety.

Since then, I've seen a huge change in my outlook.

I know that complete security and happiness can only come from God, my Creator, who knows and loves me better than I know and love myself. I don't have to look to what others think of me for value or acceptance. I no longer need to rely on alcohol to give me confidence or numb my problems. I don't need to turn to a dangerous diet to make me physically acceptable to others.

Looking back at my life before knowing Jesus, I never want to go back to the way I was before. My life is still not perfect, and never will be on this earth, but my motivation for life now is to enjoy it to the full, showing others the same love that God has shown me.

That's the point of baptising Freyja today. Not that God will be far away from her but begin to make a home in her. Christ is born into every human heart that opens itself to him. God desires to be at home in me, in you, in Freyja.

In 1534 Martin Luther wrote a carol for his children. It has the verse:-

*O dear Lord Jesus for your head  
Now I make the softest bed.  
The chamber where this bed shall be  
Is in my heart, inside of me.*

It's easy to lose the plot at Christmas. In the busyness of trying to get everything done before Christmas we can forget that Jesus is the reason for the season.

As we get ready for Christmas take a moment to invite Christ to be born in you. A poet (Silesius) wrote, “though Christ be born a thousand times if he’s not born in you, your heart is forlorn.”

Let us pray:

*Loving God, you promised long ago to come to your temple,  
We open our hearts to be temples for you.  
Be born in us again this Christmas  
That we might know you at the very heart of our being and lives,  
That from this central core we might have love in abundance to share with others,  
This Advent, Christmas and forever.  
Amen*