

Sunday 24th December 2022 (Watchnight)

Luke 2:1-7

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Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's word:

Our Holy God, we come before you this Holy Night as our hymn has just said, we come with awe and joy, with faith and love. But Father, we likely also come with our doubts and even our sorrows. Maybe sorrows that are very raw, maybe very new and so we would ask, our God, to meet with You this night, to meet with You and to hear from You. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

I was trying to switch off from work and so decided to watch a little TV on one of the various apps that I can turn to on my phone and in the adverts, and before and during, there was a comedian popped up and he said this line which probably made me chuckle; I probably shouldn't 'I love Christmas but by the end of it I hate everyone near me.'

And, I don't know if you can sympathize with that at all. I'm not saying that I do, but, just in case my wife's watching from home, but there are bits of Christmas that seem, at times, a little inconvenient. I wonder if you find any parts of Christmas inconvenient. Because something can be inconvenient if it's bothersome. Maybe you find the stress of buying presents a little bothersome and thinking 'Oh, what did I get them this year?' Maybe the stress of preparing this special meal with all the anticipation and how many courses or parts of potatoes should there be, is it mashed and roast and boiled or croquettes, or all four. Some thinking can be inconvenient if it's disruptive, it's Christmas, disrupts our routine. Maybe you really like your job and the idea of taking a holiday just feels disruptive or maybe the prospect of being woken before seven o'clock tomorrow morning. And I've already warned my daughter, if the clock says anything beyond or before zero six, she's not to come through. Something can be inconvenient if it's vexing some of us. Haven't seen our family or friends in maybe a wee while and maybe there's good reason for that because some of those family and friends can be somewhat vexing. In all these ways, and more besides, it may be possible to see Christmas as somewhat inconvenient.

And I have to wonder that very first Christmas did Mary find some of Christmas inconvenient just a little. After all, here's a girl, a young girl ridiculed, likely ostracized for being pregnant before the wedding day, and everyone's a little bit unsure if it's really Joseph's or not. Here's a young girl then at eight months pregnant because of the whim of an emperor thousands of miles away, she has to travel three to four days on the back of a donkey, to cover about 90 miles, all just so that she can have her name, and probably not even her name, written on a bit of paper. This young girl then arriving in said town of Bethlehem and finding nowhere to stay, forced to give birth in a stable as a measure of last resort.

With all these very, very clear inconveniences I have to wonder was Mary just waiting for Christmas to pass to get it done, get to the other side?

Well, knowing a little of Mary's character I'm not sure she was that kind of individual. You see, nine months earlier in a passage that we've looked at earlier in our Advent

series she said, in response to the angel 'I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.' I think those words marked out Mary's path because they marked out her character as well. Here is a woman of faith whose maturity of faith, even at such a young age, let's remember she would be in her somewhere in her teens, her maturity of faith knew that faith had to be combined with action and with actions, that at times, can be very inconvenient. If that's her character then why did she do it and why did she persevere all the way? Why was she not simply waiting for Christmas to pass?

Well, I think Mary knew that this inconvenient faith was worth it. It was worth it because she also knew whom she carried in her body. God. Who'd taken on human form and come very, very close.

It's a startling thought to think that the God of all creation would become human, would humble himself so incredibly.

But that is what we remember and celebrate this night and although the joy is not maybe as effusive as we had at the family service, it's a joy marked with a measure of awe, with awestruckness, and maybe that was what Mary also carried a little off, because, I think, more than her having a blind or a duty bound faith, I think Mary had faith in a God who had come close, who is part of humanity now, and who had come to change the world.

For Mary could also recall these words of the Angel before she had replied the angel had said to her 'He (this child) will be great and the son of the most high, His kingdom will never end.' Mary knew that God had come to change things. He'd come to bring hope and, in giving herself through inconvenient faith, Mary got to partner with God and His purposes and it transformed our life.

So, what about us, friends, on the cusp of this new Christmas Day? What's God's word for us tonight?

Well, what if friends, the invitation of God at this Watchnight Service is not simply to go through the motions of tradition or duty-bound faith, where we turn up and tick the box? What if the invitation is to see the inconvenient faith leads to life and it leads to great opportunities? What if the greatest inconvenience actually might lead to the greatest opportunity, to let God into your life tonight and in the years to come? That, if you allow Him, the King and the manger to be King in your heart, King over your life, then who knows where inconvenient faith might lead you. Who knows how inconvenient faith might transform your life beyond your imagining.

Earlier today I was on Facebook very briefly because one of my friends whom I follow and it popped up a little notification, and Marion, I met Marion well four years ago this Autumn just leading into Christmas, and four years ago Marion came to faith and she came to faith because someone said to her 'Marion, it's not about being a good person, it's not about this Christianity lark, it's about a relationship with Jesus,'

and so, bold as brass, Marion, four years later, puts on Facebook about her friendship, her relationship with Jesus and how it has transformed her life. How she has transformed from this woman who was who was struggling and doubting and in a place of real darkness at times, to a place of joy a place of confidence and wanting others to know this very same Jesus.

Friends, you can know this Jesus this year too and we'd love to help you. You can put inconvenient faith into practice by coming to church and getting involved. We all like to have Sunday to ourselves but, if you don't turn up, you miss out. You don't get to hear from God through His Word preached and through gathering with His people. You can put inconvenient faith into to practice by reading His Word, the Bible, and praying, giving Him some time and space amongst all the busyness. You can put inconvenient faith into practice by learning His ways and learning to walk in Him and, let's admit, it's all horribly inconvenient, it requires a measure of sacrifice but, maybe if like Mary, we'll respond in faith and entrust to the one who came at Christmas then maybe, we too will find a new and fuller life through Jesus.

Now, you may be someone who's been following Jesus for a little while you wonder 'What's the word to me tonight, Scott?' Well, I was reminded this past week of Eugene Peterson who said that a mark of being a faithful disciple is someone who lives out a long obedience in the same direction, a long obedience in the same direction. So, maybe tonight, rather than on Hogmanay, maybe tonight, on the cusp of a new Christmas Day, may we make that commitment to Jesus, to keep on keeping on, to keep following, to keep a long obedience in the same direction, to keep on the journey, long though it may be, heavy though the loads may feel at times, because both our journey and the journey of Mary, well they're just an echo, a pale reflection really of a much greater and more sacrificial journey, that of Jesus who journeyed from the glories of Heaven to earth and took up human form, and became a servant rather than being served, and he kept journeying, journeying faithful all the way to the cross that you and I might know life in all its fullness.