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“Christmas in Australia” Carol06(mid)

I wonder what would have happened if Jesus had been born in Australia rather than in Israel? I wonder if the Saviour of the world had been born in our backyard during the time when we were alive how would we have reacted? I wonder if God's Son were to come again, this time to our nation, would we be ready for Him, right now?

I find it interesting, that we often don't think about Jesus in an Australian context, do we? Sure there is the old joke about the fact that if he came here to Australia he would be unlikely to find any wise men, let alone three and certainly he would struggle to find a virgin. And there are a couple of Christmas Carols that talk about brogga dancing and moths flying. And occasionally we see a Christmas Card with Jesus in the outback; but very rarely do we attempt to bring Jesus this close.

Maybe it's easier if he is far away from us. Maybe it's less threatening if we can just right Jesus off as in another time and in another place. I don't know. But I wonder what would have happened if Jesus had come to Australia rather than to Bethlehem.

This year, the Bible Society produced a new translation of the Bible into Oz. And while its translation is particularly loose, it does try and put the birth of Jesus into an Australian context. Let me read you a bit about the birth of Jesus.

“In those days Caesar Augustus ordered a head count of the whole Roman world. (This was the first big tally when Quirinius ran the Syrian branch of the empire.) And everyone had to go back to the bit of the country they were born in to fill in the forms.

So Joe hiked up from Nazareth (in Galilee shire) to Bethlehem (in Judea shire) because this spot in the mulga was where King David came from, and Joe's family tree had King David in the top branches. He went there to fill in the forms & sign the register with his fiancée, Mary, who was pretty near nine months at this time. While they were there, she gave birth to a baby boy. She wrapped him in a bunny rug, and tucked him up in a feed trough in a back shed, because the pub was full to bursting.

There were some drovers, camped out in a paddock nearby, keeping an eye on their mob of sheep that night. Their eyes shot out on stalks when an angel of the Lord zapped into view, and the glory of the Lord filled the air like a thousand volts of electricity. The angel said, “Stop looking like a bunch of stunned mullets. Let me give you the drum, the good oil. Its top news for the whole crew - everyone, everywhere. Today in that little town on the hill a rescuer has been born, he is the promised one, the King, the Lord. And here's how you'll find him: the nipper is wrapped in a bunny rug and lying in a food trough.”

And before you could say, “Well, I'll be blowed” the whole sky was filled with more angels than you could count, all singing away at the top of their lungs (if angels have lungs, that is) “God is great! God is bonzer - and to everyone on this planet who's on God's side, peace and good will, and by the way have a Happy Christmas “(Which rather confused the drovers because they had never heard of Christmas before.)

Suddenly the whole choir had nipped off in the blink of an eye. The drovers said to each other, “We'd better make tracks to Bethlehem and have a squiz at what's happened - check out this message from God.”

So the lot of them shot through like a Toorak tram to Bethlehem - and they found Mary, and Joe and the baby who was, sure enough, wrapped in a bunny rug and lying in a food trough. When they'd seen this, they told every Tom, Dick and Harry about what had happened, and everyone who heard the story was blown away by it."

Now I think that's pretty good. Christmas in Australia. Jesus coming to us, God touching us where we are. But I want us to think briefly this morning, if Jesus had come to Australia and you had found out about it, what would you have done?

I suppose there's only a few options aren't there. Just as there were only a few options that first night in Bethlehem. For the first option and the one that the vast majority of people actually did, was that they did nothing. They didn't recognise that God had come amongst them. Whether they were too busy with the census that was on, whether they were tied up with their family's, whether they were flat out making a crust, most people failed to do anything at all. Some like the innkeeper, could find no room for them in the inn or their heart.

So do you think you would have been one of those who did nothing? Are you one of those people that at this time of year get so caught up with your job, with your family, with all the shopping and the food that you never find time for God? Well this Christmas put Jesus at the centre of your priority list. Spend time with Him. Find time in your busyness, to thank Him for your many blessings. Come to Church. Decide how you are going to give thanks to Him. Make sure that this festive time there is nothing more important to you than your relationship with Jesus.

But not every one just ignored Jesus that first Christmas. There were some who did the exact opposite. You see when the news that the Messiah, God's anointed one had come as a king to Bethlehem; there were some who opposed him. You see Herod heard the news from the Wise Men and he tried to glean info out of them. He said he was going to worship this baby but really what he wanted to do was to wipe him off the face of the earth. And in order to do that, he ended up killing all the babies of two years old or under in the Bethlehem area.

You see on that first Christmas, there were some who actually opposed Jesus coming. Now I'm sure if Jesus came to Australia there would be some who would do that today. They are the people who jump up and down and say that Jesus shouldn't be mentioned in schools or in day care centres because we don't want to offend those of a different faith. They are the ones who talk about Christmas being a family time, a time for giving and never mention Jesus at all

And it is up to us to quietly but firmly to put Jesus back on the agenda. Sure he can defend himself, I know that. But we are called to contend for the gospel. We are encouraged to make the most of every opportunity. We are told to be salt and light to our world. So rather than just keep quiet when people oppose Jesus this Christmas, let us graciously and lovingly tell them the truth about why God entered our world.

But there were two further reactions to Jesus, that were more positive than first Christmas. The first came from the shepherds. They heard that God had done something wonderful, so they left what they were doing and they went to worship God. They showed how important God was to them by doing what God's angels said and by coming to Jesus.

Likewise if Jesus had come to Australia I'm sure there would have been people of all walks of

life who would see there is nothing more important to do than to worship God. There would be people who put that over and above work or sport or going to the beach.

Likewise we should be people who want to be obedient to what God's messengers would say, people who listen to Lord's instructions, though his messengers the prophets and apostles. We should do that every day, so when God does so something extra special, we are ready and willing to join in. This Christmas will we be like these people who offer ourselves as sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, as our spiritual act of worship. For worship is not just something we do on a Sunday morning but through everyday acts of obedience to our God.

And of course the last reaction came from the wise men. These people were learned men who looked at the world around them and constantly looked to God's word for answers. So when they saw the star, they knew this meant something special. God's OT had promised that a special star would be a pointer to a new king, a king of the Jews, a king for God's people. The wise men were wise because they looked at the times and knew their Scriptures and were able to put these two things together.

Now I'm sure if Jesus came today to Australia there would be people who closely follow the times. People who would seek to find the answers to the current situations from knowing God's word. Who would see that the Bible has the answers to today's problems and so they would have been ready, ready to leave everything and come to the baby Jesus.

So are we people like that? People ready to deny self, take up our Cross, and follow Him? People who will go anywhere, do anything for the One who sent his own son into this world to be born in manger and who would grow up and die on the cross for the sins of the world.

I suppose what I am saying is that the same sorts of reactions that we found that first Christmas in Bethlehem would have been found if that first Christmas had occurred in Australia. Some would have ignored Jesus, they were just too busy. Some would opposed Jesus, they didn't like what Jesus had to offer. Some would have left everything in order to worship him and others would have understood God's promises in the Bible and would have been ready, when God decided to act.

So what would you have done? If Jesus had come this year, what would have been your reaction? Would you have been ready for his coming or would you have been unprepared? Would you have worshipped him or ignored him? Given him gifts or thrown him a insult?

Because the truth of the matter is that Jesus has promised to come to Australia. He has promised to visit our world a second time. This time he won't come as a baby, but as a judge. This time he wont come to give us another chance, he will come to take those with him who have taken up their chance. This time our eternity will hang in the balance depending upon how we react. Which means we have to be ready, ready right now for Jesus to come again, for him to come a second time.

Which is why, I think, we Christians should celebrate Christmas in Australian in 2003. Now we know that the Bible doesn't tell us to celebrate Jesus birth, like it told the OT saints to celebrate Passover or the Feast of the Tabernacles. We know that in Australia Christmas is almost an entirely secular holiday and that Santa and Rudolf are far more important than Jesus.

But in Australia, we have a chance, our best chance throughout the year to tell the typical Aussie the good news about Jesus. They wouldn't darken the door of a Church for 364 days in the year, but around Christmas time they will make an exception. And so this Christmas time over 100 people who normally don't come to Church will pass through these doors.

The average Aussie is not interested in us teaching religious education in our schools, but at Christmas time each of the local primary schools held special Christmas Assemblies and I got to talk to over 900 kids about the story of Jesus. The typical Aussie isn't interested in any of the things the Church run, but if you put on a Christmas Carols service, a Carols and Coffee afternoon, a Christmas in July celebration, they will turn up. And when Steve and I have spoken at these sort of events this year, we have talked to 1100 people who don't normally go to our Church.

You see Christmas gets under their guard, and gives us a chance at telling them the good news. So I know that Easter is more important for us Christians, I know that Communion is vital to keep us trusting in what God has done, but Christmas, Christmas is the best time for our friends and family to be told about Jesus. That he came to this earth as a baby and that he will soon come again as our judge.

So lets make the most of Christmas this year. Lets respond with worship and lets invite others to join us in worship. Lets give our gifts to our friends and family but let us give the gift of ourselves to God. Lets write our cards to our friends, but let us also use this opportunity to share the good news of Jesus. Lets enjoy the good things that God has given us, but let us also share these good things with those who are without in both our nation and our world.

But let me conclude by reading for you a poem I was given a week or so ago, called "If Today was His birth"...

If today were His birth, instead of His birthday
Would you hear the angel's glad song,
Or are your ears so deafened by the noise of the world
And the sounds you've heard for so long?

If today were his birth would you know the young couple
As the parents of the Christ-child to be?
Or would you say "There's no room" and turn him away.
Too blind the Saviour to see?

Would you notice the brilliance of the star
announcing the birth of the Lord?
Could you accept the poor shepherds from afar
And make them welcome as guests in your home

If today were His birth instead of His birthday
Would you turn Him away?
Just what would you say if today were the day
He came and knocked on your door?

