

STAR CHILD

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As 2022 draws to a close, I find myself, yet again, in a spirit of reflection. Looking back at the year that was and all of it that went with it, for myself and our family, and others I know of, as well as what I see on the television or read about on various forms of media.

One thing I know for sure is that in the midst of happy time, joy filled days, that life isn't perfect, bad things can and do happen to good people and vice versa at times. Some of us reading this, right now, today are grieving, some of us are sick, some of us have lost mobility or our health, some of us are lonely. Some of us are emotionally or financially bankrupt, some have lost so much, homes flooded, churches emptier and aging, interest rates are up and so is our cost of living, and so on and so on, and yet perhaps someone reading this right now, might be able say, they don't have a care in the world? I've said before and I say again, Life is such a rollercoaster!!

Yet when we stop for a moment and think of what has been recorded about the world Jesus was born into, it was in probably the worst of possible circumstances: he and his family were homeless (at least temporarily); under a cloud in terms of social doubt over the morality of his conception; to a teenaged or pre-teenaged mother; in a country under foreign rule, and about to be made a refugee before he turned two. And the shepherds who greeted his arrival, were the people everyone avoided because of their impurity – people who weren't even allowed into the temple, the place to meet God, because it was too holy for their presence.

What on earth was God doing?

Or, rather, what was God doing on earth?

God did what the shepherds could not do – God went out to meet them and made the place where they could access holy, just like many of the places where we gather for worship is holy because God is where we are.

This is the real Christmas gift. However, we are, whatever we are experiencing, what the story of Christmas tells us, is that God has done what we can't do. God has come to us, right where we are, in the mess and the chaos, the conditions in which we are living. No matter what is right or wrong with our lives – whatever is going on... God still comes to us.

That's the real meaning of Christmas – God and Humankind meeting – at our place; God's love made visible in the life of Jesus. He is the light of the world, lighting up the darkest days and bringing hope.

Our daughter Melanie has always loved stars, they are her symbol of hope. They are that which she looks to when darkness comes, they bring her joy, she has stars on key rings, and phone covers, and jewellery and make up kits, and just about everything, she has

been gifted a star in the galaxy from friends who love her, and she can look to the millions of stars and know that one now has her name on it, and she gifted us, her Mum and Dad a star in memory of her beautiful brother and our son Luke with his name on it. Stars are a sign of hope, lighting up the dark, the cause us to look up, not down, they remind us we are not alone.

Ann Weems wrote many meaningful poems and one she wrote called star giving speaks for me to you today.

STAR-GIVING

What I'd really like to give you for Christmas is a Star...
Brilliance in a package,
something you could keep in the pocket of your jeans
or in the pocket of your being,
something to take out in times of darkness,
something that would never snuff out or tarnish.
something you could hold in your hand.
something for wonderment,
something for pondering,
something that would remind you of
what Christmas has always meant:
God's Advent Light into the darkness of this world.

But stars are only God's for giving,
and I must be content to give you words and wishes
and packages without stars.

But I can wish you life as radiant as the Star
that announced the Christ Child's coming,
and as filled with awe as the shepherds who stood beneath its light,
And I can pass on to you the love that has been given me,
ignited countless times by others who have knelt in Bethlehem's Light

Perhaps, if you ask, God will give you a star.

My prayer is that Christmas comes for you and others this year in beautiful ways, and that each may be able to catch a glimpse of a star, something to cause them to look up and know they are not alone and have hope for a new day.

New Zealander Shirley Erena Murray is one of my all-time favourite hymn writers and I leave you with a couple of lines from one of her hymns by way of Blessing. The Hymn is called Star Child

Star-Child, earth-Child, go-between of God, love
Child, Christ Child, heaven's lightning rod:

This year, this year, let the day arrive when Christmas
comes for everyone, everyone alive.

God bless you and yours and may the light of Christ
shine on you, around you and within you is my prayer.
Amen.