

Luke 2:1-14**Chaos and confusion**

Tonight, as we gather to celebrate the birth of our saviour, I bring to you grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

One of the headlines on the ABC today was 'Christmas Eve Chaos'. They weren't talking about our children's programme tonight, but the about cancelled flights and people being stuck waiting for covid tests. But it got me thinking about the story of the first Christmas. We're so familiar with it that we easily gloss over how chaotic, how unpredictable, how confusing the whole situation would have been for those involved.

The first lot of chaos comes from the political world. Caesar Augustus wanted some order in the empire, a clear count of all the people, likely for the sake of properly taxing everyone, and so he declared a census. And to satisfy his desire for order and accuracy, the people were thrown into chaos all travelling back to their hometowns to register. Whatever Joseph and Mary's plans had been in their betrothal and miraculous pregnancy, they were out the window and a trip to Bethlehem was now required.

Then upon arrival in Bethlehem, more chaos and confusion. Giving hospitality to visiting relatives was a big deal in ancient Israel. And with so many people travelling for the census, there's going to be a lot of pressure. Imagine you're the one running the same farm that your grandparents did, what would you do if all of their descendants came to stay? All your siblings, all your cousins, your parents, your children or grandchildren, aunts, uncles, the whole mob come back. And they all expect to stay with you. It would just be utter chaos and confusion. It's usually chaotic enough when just some of them visit for Christmas but imagine having the whole lot at once. And then once we've figured out where everyone's staying, including putting some in the stable with the animals, we've got a heavily pregnant Mary to deal with. There's no clean hospital delivery room here. Just more of the same chaos.

Then we jump to the next part of the story. Shepherds are guarding their flocks at night. The usual routine is interrupted, not by a human visitor, but by an angel. And then a whole host of angels. Scripture says the shepherds were terrified, and this often goes hand in hand with chaos and confusion. We're seeing it in our society at the moment. People don't know what's going on, there's a lack of good order, and so fear is a common response.

The shepherds managed to move on from the initial shock and went to visit this newborn child. This otherwise ordinary night had been turned upside down, and they had the privilege of meeting the Messiah. Heaven and earth had met in the most obscure place. It wasn't in the great palace of Caesar Augustus, nor in the slightly less extravagant one of King Herod. The authorities that normally bring rule and order weren't involved.

But what happened at that first Christmas only had the appearance of chaos. What was really happening was that the God of creation, the God who brought order out of chaos and light out of darkness, enters into the chaos of human existence. A lot of it seems like chaos to us because it shows us that we are not in control. We tend to like order and regularity, especially when we are the ones making it that way. We don't so much like order being imposed upon us. But that is the very problem that Christ came to address. We reject God's ordering of our lives because we think we know better. We reject God's authority over our lives because we want to be in charge. But that's what actually results in chaos and confusion.

Thanks to God's mercy and grace, we're not left in that state. The birth of Jesus was God entering into our mess and bringing us his peace. The birth is good news for all the world because it means we're not left alone in whatever is causing chaos for today. And if it's something different tomorrow, then Christmas is still good news for us.

So as we do celebrate tonight, as gather for the second year running with all sorts of regulations and restrictions, we still know that the baby born in Bethlehem is the king of kings. We have a mighty saviour, a Messiah, born for us, to bring us out of darkness into his glorious light. We have a redeemer who rescues us from sin and death. He is Immanuel, which means 'God with us', and he is with us in all the moments of our lives, whether it's chaos and confusion, or order and predictability. Either way, our God brings us his peace, an eternal peace that is unlike anything else in this world. And so may that peace, that special peace of God, be with you tonight and in the days to come as we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.