

ORDER OF SERVICE

Boxing Day 2021

Doxology 710
Now to the King of heaven

Prayer of Invocation

Hymn 65
Angels from the realms of glory.

Young at Heart
Christine Bradbeer

Welcome and Notices
Mr Keith Ferres, Session Clerk

Offering and Dedication

Hymn 58
Good Christians all, rejoice

Reading: Luke 1:39-56
Sonya Rutherford

Sermon
Fear not, the Lord reigns!

Prayer of Intercession
and
The Lord's Prayer

Hymn 163 (Rejoice)
Joy to the world

Benediction



NOTICES

26 December 2021
www.blackburnpc.org.au

Wednesday Prayer Meeting is in recess till February
In January Services continue every Sunday at 11 am

Sunday 2 January 11 am Divine Worship Gathered
Also streamed on Facebook Live.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

Congregational members: **Bennie LOCKE**



and

Andrew ADAMS is currently on home assignment
having served for several years with Pioneers in Japan.

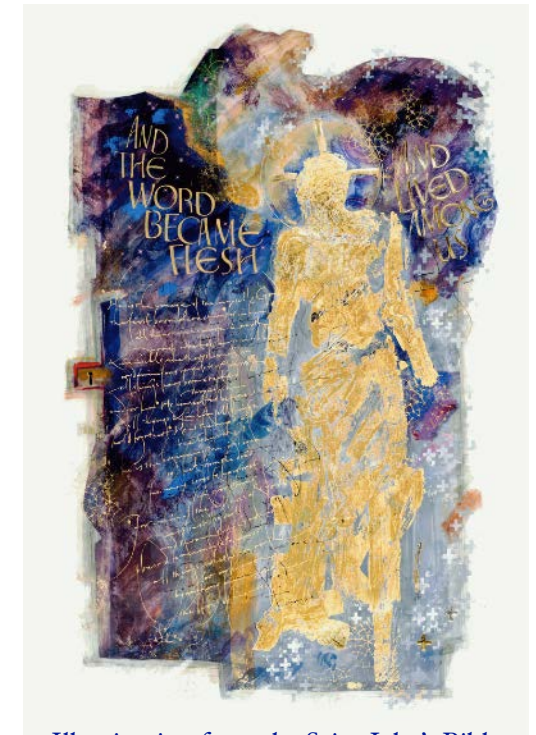


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Illumination from the Saint John's Bible
The Word became flesh.
John 1





Thousands of people remained in prolonged pre-trial detention, including human rights defenders, journalists, politicians, lawyers and social media influencers. Conditions of detention remained cruel and inhuman and prisoners were denied adequate health care, which led or contributed to at least 35 deaths in prisons or shortly after release. Fair trial guarantees were routinely flouted. Death sentences were handed down and executions were carried out. Women were prosecuted on "morality" charges for the way they dressed, acted or earned money online. Dozens of workers were arbitrarily arrested and prosecuted for exercising their right to strike. Residents of informal settlements were forcibly evicted. The authorities arrested and prosecuted Christians, Shi'a Muslims and others for blasphemy.

Amnesty International 2021

Islam is seen as the central pillar of society in Egypt and Christians are viewed as second-class citizens. Laws restrict Christians from sharing the gospel and although converting to Christianity is not forbidden by law, it is heavily opposed. Those who leave Islam to follow Jesus may lose custody of their children or be imprisoned for sharing their faith. Conversion is seen as shameful to a family's honour and can lead to threats, beatings and banishment.

Christians are monitored by their local communities and attacked for sharing about Jesus. Mob attacks often go unpunished by local authorities, leaving Christians even more vulnerable. Extremist Islamic preachers continue to fuel a climate of intolerance and hostility. Authorities and community members restrict churches and Christian organisations from building new churches or running social services. Christians of all backgrounds find it extremely difficult to find places to gather as a church.

Open Doors Australia 2020

Sermon Outline

Fear not, the Lord reigns!

Our reflection this morning draws again on the two birth narratives of the the Gospels. Picking up the dark themes implicit in Matthew's story and the triumph of joy which suffuses Luke's story. This guides us to think

1. Dark Themes (A) Herod's paranoia (Matthew 2:3)

In December 2008 King Herod was featured in the National Geographic magazine. According to the authors his outstanding contribution was his building program. He was responsible for the Harbour and city of Caesarea, the fortress known as Herodium, the enormous extension to the rebuilt Jerusalem Temple, and Masada among other constructions. He had the difficult job of keeping the Romans (with whom he was friendly) and the Jews (whom, as an Idumean, he easily antagonised) on good terms. Most of our background comes from the Jewish historian Josephus, who wrote for the Romans. The killing of the infant boys in Bethlehem is disputed by some scholars, but fits the profile of a paranoid man who killed two of his own sons and a wife. The saying was "better to be Herod's pig than his son". Writing for Jews, Matthew is clear about any contender for king of the Jews!

(B) Imperial power (Luke 2:1, 3:1)

Luke is very aware of the Imperial background to Jesus' birth, mentioning both Augustus and Tiberius. It is against this background that Luke writes his Gospel for a Gentile readership. He uses terms that were part of the Emperor's self description: he claimed to be 'saviour' of the world and the bringer of 'peace'.

Luke notes the decree of Augustus affects the birth town of Mary's child; Bethlehem. Eventually it is under Imperial Authority that the Messiah will be executed by a vacillating Roman Procurator who said he should be crucified. Finally the message of Jesus' reign and salvation will reach into the heart of the Empire (Acts 16) and ultimately transcend that of any Emperor.

Might and power do not achieve the kingdom of God. Quite the contrary. It is by the Spirit of Jesus.

2. Joy reigns - a Saviour! (Matthew 1:21, Luke 2:11)

The dark forces which tinge the birth narratives represent a real and present danger. Did we not already know the story we might feel that for Mary's child simply to survive would be a wonder. What can a child in a manger hope for in the face of Imperial whim or Herod's paranoia?

The answer is not hard to find. It is written in Israel's scriptures. Those very scriptures which shaped the teaching, the life and even the death of Jesus.

In all of this the transforming power of the Spirit of God was active in his deeds of love, judgement, mercy and redemption. Such power was unknown in the selfish and tyrannical forces active in this world. A new kingdom was inaugurated, a new reign had begun. God's new world had been born.

Watch and listen as two friends, one a world renowned Bible scholar and the other one of the world's leading geneticists, NT Wright and Francis Collins, as they sing the story, of the new world that Christ has brought to birth.



Jesus was born, despite all the odds, that we are born by faith into that new world.

Introducing Dr Francis Collins a physician-geneticist, and the 16th Director of the National Institutes of Health. He was appointed by President Barack Obama in 2009 and confirmed by the U.S. Senate, and by successive US Presidents. Prior to becoming the NIH director, Dr. Collins served as the director of the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) from 1993-2008, where he led the international Human Genome Project, which culminated in April 2003 with the completion of a finished sequence of the human DNA instruction book.

