

Christmas Day, 2018, Luke 2:1-20

God with Us, God for Us

This morning's story is a classic Christmas "feel good" thing. But...there is a lot going on here. So, let me begin with it, and then refer to the Biblical narrative.

The Story: The Christmas Caravan

Let's begin by thinking about the characters! There are really only three: Simon, his mother, who remains nameless, and the mayor. There are others who form a backdrop of sorts: the residents at the caravan park and the councillors from local council. What do we make of them, as individuals in their particular situations or contexts? Simon's mom struggles. On the face of it, it seems that there has been a marital break-down and she is forced to live in a caravan with her son; which we are told is better than where they were before. Simon, for his part, appears accepting of the situation – even resilient, as he decides that he will enter the Christmas competition for the best decorated house. What we find is a child who gathers the junk of the caravan park: cans, plastic bottles, shells and silver paper, in order to dress-up their little home-on-wheels. Finally, there is the mayor, who will share the judging of the competition. Our initial impression is not favourable. His response is to ignore Simon's attempt at home-decoration, because he lives in a caravan, not a house. But there is more to the mayor than what initially meets the eye. This man appears to be able to move beyond the puerile local politics. He sees this courageous child, this irrepressible young boy, and decides to honour him. What stands out in the story is the moral awakening of this man. As the mayor gazes upon the *silver star* on top of the caravan, the penny drops, and Simon and his mom are awarded a week's holiday at the beach, which as we see changes their lives.

What is moving about this story? What is it that touches us? There is the courage of mother and child as they face up to the realities of poverty. There is the extraordinary, refreshing openness and sensitivity of a local politician, who does the opposite of what we would expect. There is also the coming together, the converging of both sets of people to make a *new situation* possible. Alone, Simon and his mother cannot achieve it. Alone, the mayor, remains in his political tower, wilfully isolated and hamstrung.

The exciting point of the story for me is this: that each in their own way accepts, *their human existence*. Each deals with their own natures, including those aspects that are both negative and positive. Simon carries on irrepressibly even amid disappointment. The mayor, finds a way out of, beyond, usual political behaviour. Each comes to a point of being present to themselves, having a sense of themselves. Each in this story uses their freedom well.

Christmas: The Incarnation

This is what the incarnation of God is about. We so often think – if we think at all – of the Christmas story – as an abstract thing. Sure, we have Mary and Joseph, we have the shepherds, we have the animals. But when we think about God becoming human, it remains vague, nebulous, obscure: a bit like a blank board.

But it is not. The Christmas story is about God accepting human existence and working out in a very concrete way what that might look like: what ultimately becomes the life of Jesus. The good news of Christmas is not just that God becomes human, but that it is a struggle. Accepting our human existence, bearing it and making sense of it – a daily challenge for all of us – is something that God understands because he has done it.

Happy Christmas!

