

A Christmas Reflection – “Living Nativity” by Jennifer Irving

This year at Centennial we have been using a resource for worship from The Prayer Bench called “The Living Nativity”. (Fun little aside, Janice MacLean, author of the Prayer Bench, was the minister in Honeywood when I was a teenager and was both my role model and my mentor as I discerned my own call to ministry). I thought the resource was titled “Living Nativity” because it was going to breathe new life into the characters who make up our Nativity scene—the wise ones, the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, Jesus—Emmanuel himself—God incarnate—coming to life more fully through our study and worship. And it did that—and didn’t leave out the animals either! I have a new appreciation for all those that make up this story of Christmas we celebrate.

But, what struck me most about the “Living Nativity” was its call to each one of us, living now, to come to this stable. It’s invitation to us to see that this manger scene isn’t just a snapshot in time for thousands of years ago but lives still—through us when we gather in close from wherever we find ourselves in our own lives.

And the reality is, we find ourselves in all different places when Christmas arrives – both communally – there are those here just filled with wonder and joy and ready for Christmas morning to dawn and shine a light on all that is right in the world, and there are those who are facing a first Christmas without a loved one who just want to curl up and go back to sleep, and there are those who just got good news and those who just got the worst news of their lives, alongside those with new hopes and those with old longings. And individually, we also arrive at the manger every year a different path—carrying all our baggage that has accumulated over time. It’s not a clear cut path to joy and light, wonder and peace.

Sometimes, I think we get it into our heads that we should only come to this place, on this day, to celebrate the birth of Jesus our Lord, if we can do so joyfully, free from the weight of the world and our everyday mistakes and misgivings.

Yet, this Christmas season, I have been reminded once again that this manger has a place for everyone—whether we are scared and lonely, or simply afraid we aren’t good enough, whether we are worn down and discouraged or filled with more questions than answers, the joyful and the downtrodden, the peace-filled and the chaotic.

Here, the angels reassure us again and again and again, we don’t have to be afraid. We are welcomed, we are celebrated, we are holy!

This is what this manger scene reveals, God incarnate. The word made flesh. Making all humanity sacred. At least, that’s what I believe. That without each and every one of you, just as you are—not as who you want to be—or who I might want you to be—but just as you are, this moment, this day, this hour, is sacred, holy and beloved by our God.

Your presence here makes this a living nativity.

Thank you, for bringing this day to life and for being a part of “God with us”. Emmanuel! Christ is born. Amen.