

It is not quite true to say, "The only news this past week has been the Bondi massacre and related topics." We come towards the end of Advent. It is fair to ask what this crisis has to say to us who believe Jesus is the Messiah. Bishop Barker reminded people in his Christmas letter, "the solution to evil is neither a political one, nor a legal one. The only ultimate solution to evil is the light that shines in the darkness, namely Jesus." We may ask, in what way is Jesus the solution? Let us begin with a scene in a home in the twenty-first century.

A young woman is telling her Mum, "I'm pregnant." By young I'm thinking of teenagers., 13 to 19. Even a woman at the marriageable age of 18, doesn't mean they are married or expected to be pregnant. There are three main solutions, one of which is morally questionable.

You have the picture. Now we turn to Mary and Joseph. We will use our marriageable age to say Mary is 18. They were engaged. Mary tells Joseph, "I'm pregnant." How else did he know? He was embarrassed and thinks, "I'm sure I can't be responsible. She must have cheated on me." He is an upright man, fearing God, going faithfully to the synagogue, saying his prayers, careful at the company he keeps. He decides to be merciful as he knows the heavenly Father is merciful. We hear him thinking, "I will not bring her to shame. We'll get a divorce. She's got family in the country. She can go there." The plans of men and women don't always go so easily.

We heard Matthew's own version of the birth of Jesus. He is writing to convince people that Jesus is the Messiah they expected. He began his book with Abraham, the Father of the Nation. He continues with the forty-two generations between Abraham and Jesus. It is reasonable to say that this has been God's long term plan.

So in the tradition of that history, Joseph has a dream. The dream is evidence of a greater plan. An angel tells him not to be afraid of following through with the engagement and marriage. "For the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." This is a plan that has taken forty-two generations in being fulfilled. From the time of Abraham each generation has shown faith in God. Or when they have not, God has brought his judgement.

Like Abraham Joseph must have faith. His plan of divorce had seemed good to him. The angel implies a greater plan when he tells Joseph to name the baby Jesus. When he names the baby at his circumcision it will imply that humanly Joseph is the Dad of Jesus. If we ask for a meaning of the name Jesus, we say, "God Saves." It is the spiritual aspect to the birth of Jesus.

The people of Judea expected a Messiah to free them from the Roman invaders and create a new kingdom. Even at the time of his Ascension the disciples of Jesus asked when he would restore the kingdom of Israel. The angel saying, 'Jesus will save people from their sins' rejects any idea of a Messiah to free the nation from foreign powers or to win an earthly dominion for Israel.

Matthew not only gives the account of the dream, he looks for a verse from a prophet that seems to back it all up. It is a proof text. The original story of the virgin conceiving and giving birth to a son, was a time of political upheaval in the northern kingdom of Israel. It was threatened by an empire and some other vassal states. Judah's king was afraid his territory would be next. Think about Australia pushed and pulled by overseas forces; you have the idea.

The prophet Isaiah said that by the time the young woman's child was weaned, the crisis for Judah will be over. The 'young woman' became a 'virgin' when the Hebrew was translated into Greek. Now Matthew uses the verse as a prediction of what he is relating. The quote would give his Jewish readers evidence that this is God's plan. The rest of the verse strengthens his thinking. "They shall call him Emmanuel." Matthew tells us this means "God with us."

So as God was with the people of Judah so now God is again acting in the nation's history. It would take time to see Jesus had a message for more than Judea. He spoke to and healed people who were not only Jews but also Gentiles; people of other nations. At the time of his Ascension, Matthew reports Jesus telling his disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age." (Mtt.28:19f) The words are like an echo of Matthew's quote from Isaiah, "'They shall call him Emmanuel' God with us."

It is a challenge to us about God. Do we believe he could, or would, act in causing a woman to be pregnant. There are some people who say 'miracles don't happen.' Other people say that he wouldn't cause the pregnancy because if he did then why would he allow the Bondi massacre to happen, to name the latest event that raises the question about God's omnipotence, mightiness, activity, or lack of it. (Wright p.7)

Jesus was not the Messiah to lead an army against the Roman's in Judea. So it is unlikely he will come to lead an army to fight our particular human enemy. There is a need for political and legal solutions because that is the way a nation works. This is not the time to speak of them. We probably all have our views. Now is the time to strengthen our faith in Christ. It is not just a nice thing to say, 'God is with us.' The promise of the word Emmanuel is still true. God is with us.

He is with us in our anger, our grieving, our questions, our different points of view, with the injured. The people who took action at Bondi to protect people, to act on the spur of the moment to stop the killers, were doing right before God. It was the best of humanity as Jesus showed his humanity as he hung on the cross suffering from the sin and evil of which all of us are part.

God is with us as we prepare to celebrate the birthday of Jesus in hope, peace and with joy. That birth, so long ago, began with a pregnancy that changed people's lives for all time.