

16th August 2020 – Feast of Mary, Mother of our Lord – Chris's Sermon

Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn...

Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem to be registered. According to Ray Brown's commentary on the birth of Jesus (The Birth of the Messiah), the registration of Mary and Joseph took place during the time of the great census in the year 6 BC. (This is a documented historical event – the census was carried out when Quirinius was the governor of Roman Syria.)

The census was an audit of the population intended to help the Romans see the potential tax revenue that could be gathered from the people of Syria. (This is a very interesting reading.) In other words, the census was used by the Romans to determine the value of the people of Syria – in tax revenue. But, I think there's a bigger question here. Our reading, also encourages us to think about how we measure the value of people like Mary and Joseph. In particular, I think our reading calls us to consider the possibility that the value of a human life extends well beyond economic considerations – well beyond any potential contribution to tax revenue or the economic productivity of our nation (as we measure such things today.

What is the value of a human life? I think this is a very contentious question at the moment – in fact, it's divided our nation. As a result of the Covid 19 virus sweeping the world, many nations (including Australia) are now asking this very question – how do we measure the value of a human life?

I'm guessing most of you are familiar with this reading. The story of Christ's birth. It's well known and well celebrated.

Today, on this feast of Mary the mother of our Lord, I think we're invited to celebrate the true value of Mary (and Joseph). Without the blessings that they shared with Jesus – without their teachings and guidance – without their love and nurture, Jesus would never have grown into the fullness of his faith.

Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary mother of God, pray for us sinners now and in the hour of our death.

According to our Gospel, the birth of Jesus was ordinary and unremarkable in many ways – Jesus born of Mary – was born into poverty – his first bed was a stable (an animal's feeding trough) with a mattress of straw.

And yet, from these humble beginnings, we believe that Jesus grew in faith and wisdom – he grew to become the greatest teacher and leader and healer that the world has ever known.

And today, we are reminded that Mary and Joseph played a very important role in that journey. (Mary gave birth to Jesus and raised him. She was with Jesus when he went off to the temple to sit with the elders. And, of course, she was there at the end when Jesus was nailed to the cross.)

Yes, Mary and Joseph were loving parents – they raised and nurtured the light of the world – they fed that light – encouraged it, watching it grow brighter and brighter with the passing of the years.

So, today we gather to give thanks to God for the blessings that Mary (and Joseph) shared with Jesus – blessings that were then shared with the disciples and the world.

And, in a way, I think this must be the lens through which we determine the value of people like Mary and Joseph – this must be the lens through which we determine the value of those in the world today who are now at risk. The potential loss that we will experience by the death of those exposed to the Covid 19 virus extends well beyond economic considerations. The older generation that is now at risk represents a lifetime of accumulated knowledge – these are the people who gave life to my generation – fed them, nurtured them, encouraged them and watched them grow.

Like Mary, I believe that we all have a purpose. We are all called to serve.

The purpose will be different for each of us. But each of us, in our own way, are called to feed this light and see it grow brighter and brighter with the passing of the years. Some have been called to serve as priests in God's church (that's the most obvious one), but others have been called to serve as Mothers or Fathers. Some have been called to serve as teachers, or healers, or guides or friends.

Today I would ask you to consider the possibility that the value of all these lives (regardless of age) exists well beyond economic considerations. Today, we are called to measure the value of the lives of those around us – a value that extends well beyond economic considerations.

Yes, there is a purpose that shapes our lives. In the example of Mary (and Joseph), the purpose seems clear, but how do we now honour their example – how do we now serve and nurture and encourage this light to grow in those that we meet? (I don't have an answer for you – but I don't think we will find it if we only consider the impact that this virus is having on our economy. The intrinsic value of a human life is not measured in dollars and cents.

As has already been said, Mary and Joseph had a purpose (a value that can't be easily measured) – a task that they alone could fulfill.

Mary carried the unborn Jesus in her womb – she surrendered to God's will. Mary and Joseph gave life and warmth and food to Jesus – in scripture, we see Mary protect and nurture Jesus as he grows and matures.

Yes, today we celebrate that loving relationship two parents shared with their child – a relationship that continues to have an impact on the world 2000 years later. (Obviously, this value couldn't be recorded in the census – because we still can't measure it today). Today, we are reminded of the God-centred beliefs and values that have value – they shape our lives – they can become the soul of a nation – these values move us and inspire us – they offer wisdom and guidance – and they need to be protected.

You and I, we have been entrusted with a message of love that needs to be shared – and there is a need for this message in our broken and divided world.

In the days ahead, please give prayerful consideration to the blessings in your lives – the valuable blessings and gifts that have been given to you. And, I pray that we will be encouraged to look for ways to share these blessings – to protect them and preserve them, inspired by the loving example of Mary (and Joseph).

The Lord be with you.