

The Saviour has come.

This year Katherine and I became Grandparents and leading up to Sam's birth and for a short while afterwards we had 'birth stories'.

They are told to remember how it was and hopefully to give some encouragement and empathy with the new mother who will, before long, have her own birth story. When new Mum's get together they might swap birth stories, even if to dismiss them because there are more urgent topics taking their attention...but the stories are usually reserved for the next family gathering or When there is another birth on the way.

Unless you are Billy Crystal or Jesus – their birth stories are told every year.

Billy Crystal is an American actor, comedian, writer, director, producer and is perhaps best known for his role in the classic movie *When Harry met Sally*. (1989) He also starred in the Movie *City Slickers* in 1991.

He plays the part of Mitch Robbins in the middle of a full blown mid-life crisis. As his 39th birthday comes round it depresses him even further, particularly as his mother rings him up at the time she gave birth – 5:16am – to give him the annual blow by blow account of his birth...

Here is the clip. (*You can see the clip on You Tube. Just google "City Slickers Happy Birthday"*)

When asked about it later Crystal said he based the scene on his own mother who did exactly that, she rang him at the time of his birth and every single year described the whole experience all over again.

And of course the same thing happens with Jesus; not perhaps the details of when Mary's waters broke...but we love the story of Jesus birth and what's not to love?

The supernatural intervention of angels and the work of God in conception, the pathos of Joseph emotional roller coaster, the journey to Bethlehem, no room at the Inn, the Angels, the Shepherds, the Wise men, the escape to Egypt and then we airbrush out the darkest part of the story when Herod seeks to destroy the child and kills the innocent children of Bethlehem.

Apart from the last bit – it's a story we love.

The writers of Hebrews and the Gospel of John take for granted that you know the story, so why bother repeating it, they want to take you much deeper into the purpose of the incarnation.

John speaks of the incarnation in metaphysical-metaphorical terms.

The enfleshment of the eternal Word of God.

The appearance of light overcoming the darkness.

The rejection of the light by some.

The birth of Gods children by those who accept him and the revelation of truth and glory.

The writer of Hebrews uses the idea of speech and the Word to introduce Jesus. He reminds us that in the past God spoke, not once, but repeatedly...God kept on speaking, to individuals and to his people. We know some of the stories.

God spoke to Cain about the death of Abel.

God spoke to Noah to save his family.

God spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – then to Joseph who saved the family from famine, then Moses who saved the nation from slavery, then through the commandments and then through

The Saviour has come.
the prophets...God's word, God's character, God's purpose being spoken.

But now – says the writer, God has spoken in a complete and final way. The last Word is THE Word, the complete message, the total revelation. God has spoken through his Son.

He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's being.

What is God like? Look at Jesus.
What has God to say? Listen to Jesus?

Inevitably our family indulged in comparing new-born baby Sam to pictures of his Dad when he was new-born and, apart from the quality of the photographs...they were pretty much identical.

I know quite a lot of the parents of the children at the Primary school and there are some where the family likeness is very very clear, you would not hesitate to put parent and child together.

The child born in Bethlehem is not going to have Grandparents, Aunties and Uncles cooing over him and trying to work out if he looks more like Mary or Joseph. The writers of our two texts have a much grander point to make. Jesus is the reflection of God's glory, the exact imprint of his very being.

We are all used to looking at our reflection in a mirror. Our mirrors reflect perfectly compared to bible times when they used highly polished pieces of metal. That said I have a mirror at the vicarage that makes me look far older than I am - I'm not sure what's going on there.

When it says the reflection of God's glory it's referring to the Shekinah glory of God – a manifestation of God dwelling among

the people. Like the fiery pillar of the Old Testament and the cloud coming down over the tent of meeting in the desert...God was present. In Jesus, God was present.

He manifested the full character of God,
whose awesome holiness is compassionate,
whose judgement, is forgiveness,
whose power is redeeming
whose knowledge, is comprehensible.
his sovereignty, is self emptying.
Compassionate, forgiving, redeeming, comprehensible self-emptying, self giving. Here is the true light of the world.

But all that is to come. Our writers are writing decades later when so much more has been understood. In Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph have more immediate concerns; as you do when you have a new baby, no home and a threat hanging over you.

This picture was sent to me by Michael Grist, it captures something of their situation. This was painted by American Gari Melchers.



The Saviour has come.

Babies are the most vulnerable and helpless of things. If we ever doubt that Jesus surrendered his sovereignty and came in complete humility we only have to remember his birth.

As Charles Wesley puts it – *mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die, born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.*

In the film I referred to earlier, Mitch and his friends go on a two-week cattle drive and they each confront their mid-life crisis and because it's a film they emerge with hope and possibility.

Life isn't as neat as a Hollywood script and Jesus never avoids the darkness in us that we would ignore or seek to airbrush out of our lives.

A week or so back Katherine gave me one of my Christmas Presents early! It's Amazing. She bought me a head torch. Now there's no excuse for falling over tree roots when out running. I discovered how bright it was when out carol singing. I kept looking at people only for them to shy away or cover their eyes. Sorry about that.

We, like the Shepherds in this illustration experience fear as we come into the light – who want's their faults, failings and darkness exposed?? But the Angel told the Shepherds not to be afraid, the was news of great joy for all people – a saviour is born.

His saving grace is ours today – yours and mine. Our compassionate, forgiving, redeeming Lord is the exact imprint of God the Father and God is love. Perfect love casts out fear, and we have nothing to be afraid of – not from the Light of the World.

So, on this Christmas Day as we celebrate Jesus birth, our salvation story and his redeeming love, let's offer worship

Good Christian People – rise and sing.



Rev. Jon Hutchinson, 25 December 2021