

CHRISTMAS EVE 2009

They were on the road as were so many others.

Forced to travel back to their home towns because a super-power had invaded and wanted to impose its administrative structures.

They were just another young couple on the road.

She was ominously pregnant,
but at least they had a donkey for her to ride.

They had no idea where they would stay.

They hoped there would be some distant relatives that would give them space under their roof.

They wondered where their child would utter its first cry.

Their names were Joseph and Mary and they came from a small village in Afghanistan.

Another young couple.

This time with a young baby; their first child.

There had been a massacre. It was a night of terror.

It was as if the soldiers were wanting to kill every child in the village.

But they had been tipped off just in time.

They fled. They stumbled into the darkness with little more than their lives and their fear.

They knew they had no papers, no passports, but fear drove them on. Furtively crossing borders at night, trying to blend in during the days, afraid that the fear in their eyes might give them away.

There was rarely enough to eat and fear had exhausted them.

Now all they could do was wait.

Their names were Joseph and Mary and they were on an Australian vessel called the Oceanic Viking.

Their baby's name was Jeshua and they hoped he could grow up in Australia

It might seem strange to think of the holy family as refugees and asylum seekers, but they were.

The gospels portray Joseph and Mary being forced onto the road; sleeping rough, a birth in a manger- probably a cave- then with their newborn child, barely escaping a brutal massacre and fleeing to asylum in Egypt.

The birth cry of this child is the cry of every child born into risk.
And in this holy family we are confronted with every family in need at risk.

In the fragile circumstances of this child's birth we have come to recognise the approach and the very nature of God.

Here is the distinctively Christian Good News of a God
whose power is to be found most profoundly
in those who are powerless;
whose face is most clearly seen in the face of need,
whose voice speaks to us from those who are not given voice,
and who is identified most with those who have no identity.

God comes, neither through crusade or jihad,
not through crushing power, the triumph of the mighty,
the intervention of the superpowers.
God is identified, not with the dominant but the dominated,
not with the economically secure, but the most fragile.

Christmas. A child.
A fragile family sheltering with the animals;
fleeing by night across borders; seeking asylum.
On the human side all we can see is weakness and helplessness.
No strength and achievement.
No economic power. Vulnerability.

The risk-taking executives

that over-extended companies like Lehman Brothers,
and plunged the world into economic crisis,
need to hear the voice of this Christmas child,
and with this child, millions of other children at risk,
because it is the voices of these powerless children
whose lives and opportunities were gambled by them
that will most truly judge what they have done.

And the leaders gathered in Copenhagen over recent weeks,
where many voices have been heard,
often playing to domestic audiences,
with environmental brinkmanship played around the politics of global warming;
they too need to hear the voices that this Christmas child represents:
the children of Kiribas; of Bangladesh, of Africa
and even the children of farming families
trying to hold on in increasingly marginal parts of country Australia.

All of them in their own way at risk of becoming the
climate change refugees of the 21st century;
it is the voices of these powerless children,
who will judge in their silence,
what the politics of Copenhagen has been able to produce,
and what we contribute in our wanton consumption
borrowed from our planet's future.

The Christmas child; the vulnerable baby;
and with him the millions of other children at risk.

And with this child who spent his first night sleeping rough,
all those who will sleep rough tonight,
whether in Adelaide's parklands or in Africa's slums.

And with this vulnerable family,

every family that will sleep this night under a roof that can never be home, whether in prosperous Adelaide where agencies like Anglicare struggle to find housing for the disadvantaged,
or among my brothers and sisters in the Sudan,
where hundreds of thousands remain internally displaced.

The Christmas child; the vulnerable baby.
We cannot look on him unless we think of them.

There is no setting aside the beauty of the Christmas festival,
with its stories of stars and angels, shepherds and magi before the crib, , gift-giving and family gathering.

But at the heart of Christmas there is this vulnerable child.

And in this child a God who is present in a parent's fear, the cries of birth and a child's vulnerability, a mother's heart-ache and a family's fragility.

In this story we find a God who knows about the smell of poverty, the taste of betrayal and even the fear of death.

God comes to us in even in the most fragile,
the powerless , the most at risk.

We see him in this baby.

God is found where the powerful do not expect,
where the strong and privileged may not look,
in vulnerability and desperation
in dependency and gift,
in the cry of the most fragile as they call to us from their need.

In all your Christmas celebrations,
I pray you hear the cry of the vulnerable child
for his voice is the voice of God in the world.

+Jeffrey

