

Gutsy Imagination

Christmas Day **Luke 2:1-20;**

Rev J Shannon

The Christian calendar, the church, sets aside 28 days to do 'stuff'. That's what we call advent. There is 'inside' stuff that needs to happen. We know how to cook and clean but what do we do within ourselves to prepare for the birth of hope?

First of all, we need to clean up the dark cupboards that hold all the anger, resentment, loneliness and grief. Yes, we have a bucket load of grief – for everything we think we missed out on this year. It's sad. It's real. Name it – and liberate yourself. This is the time you unhook the past and not let it tie you to a fence post. Name it and let it go.

Then we have to decide to change direction. We've been in stasis. We've been jogging around in circles literally...and figuratively. Are we going to spend the next year looking back on the sad litter of 2021?... (think of it as a pile of pizza boxes) or are we going to start looking forward to a different year; a new life? ! Right now. Change direction.

The next job on the list is to stop being busy and spend some time watching and waiting. We've been let out of our cages and the temptation is to go wild. But this is the time of year when miracles *do* happen even if in small ways. What if your grumpy neighbour invites you over for a holiday drink? You'll miss the magic of the season if you don't stop, watch and wait. Take some time out, listen carefully. Hold anticipation like you might hold a baby – gently, with wonder.

Finally, it is time to wake up. Our hibernations have left us ½ asleep. Isolation has become our friend. Don't let it! Every year, hope is born. We celebrate Christmas because we *believe* in new beginnings. Wake up and wake up your neighbour.

And we have to wake up our imaginations. This new life is not going away – what do we want to do with it? The lights are on – we can't hide in the dark anymore. The Christmas story is about two impoverished people, trapped far away from home, abandoned in a barn with a confidence and certainty that

God was near and the world was about to change. That takes courageous imagination.

So what are we going to put down – and never do again. Something we have forsaken in 2021 and realised, we don't need it. Working late? Cooking for *everyone*? Boozing every night? ...and what are we going to take from this year? - something we didn't do before COVID but now will continue forever? Long walks? Regularly phoning friends?

Each year hope is born again, we are given light into darkness and we reminded that love is God in our world. He does not give up. In the year ahead we are called to have gutsy imaginations to overcome whatever obstacles COVID throws at us AND know that we are not God. There is a lot we can leave to HIM.

Somehow, the gift we must give to others is energetic, enthusiastic joy – and that's a rare and precious gift. The gift we need to give ourselves is gutsy imagination. We need to visualise this new life.

Mary dreamed of a better world. Up to her neck in danger, poverty and dislocation – she dreamed a future child that would change the *everything*.

This is the year we have learned to hold things lightly. It is a year where hopes have been dashed and dreams forsaken. And yet, now, like no other is the time to rise up. Jesus' promise to us is a new life. Forgiveness is a two-way street. Dig deep. Be real. Stay and wait. And most of all wake up from slumber; our depressions; our lonely times – reach out and wake another!

Our blessing this year comes from Stephan Mauder:

God's promise is the foundation of life. Wait in faith. Trust in God. Give voice to Christ's love for all.

Rings the bells. Awaken the world! A child will be born on Christmas Day!

May God be a bright flame before you,

Be a guiding star above you

Be a smooth path below you,

Be a kindly shepherd behind you,

Today, tomorrow and forever.

And the final word goes to 82-year-old Mavis Staples. She will always be able to say it better than most of us.

I leave you with 82 year old Mavis Staples – who says it better than me.

HYMN: Only the Lord Knows – Mavis Staples [Mavis Staples: NPR Music Tiny Desk Concert From The Archives - YouTube](#) (**STOP VIDEO AT 4:20 minutes**)