

Reflection on the Gospel — 4th Sunday of Advent Year A (Matthew 1:18-24)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

One of my friends asked me what I would like for Christmas. "Nothing", was my immediate response. "I just want to spend time with community and family and friends, especially those who would otherwise be alone". And that's what I'll be doing, simply "being with". Being-with others in joy or sorrow or in the humdrum of life is probably the best gift we can offer and the best gift we can receive. It is not always possible to be present in person and, thankfully, true friends know that "being-with" is not restricted to physical presence. There is a sense in which those we love are always with us and we are always with them, even when the demands of life and our work or ministry choices separate us geographically. Real friends are "with-us" even in our absence and "being-with" in spirit or in person is closely allied with "being-for". Today's gospel affirms "being-with" as God's Christmas gift to us.

The first chapter of Matthew's gospel tells us that the expected child Messiah or Christ-child is "God-with-us", Emmanuel. The gospel will conclude with the assurance of the resurrected Christ, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). As we celebrate the successive liturgical seasons in the coming year, we shall have the opportunity to enter into the gospel story of God-with-us and with all of creation, and to live out the pattern of the Christ story more fully in our lives.

There is no angelic annunciation to Mary in Matthew's gospel, no embrace of an expectant mother. There is no inn or innkeeper, no shepherds or shepherds' fields. These are all features of Luke's tableau. Matthew brings different features and different characters to centre stage. Chief among Matthew's characters is Joseph who, like Joseph of old, receives God's revelation in a series of dreams. The angelic announcement in today's gospel is to Joseph: he is not to be afraid, but is to accept the extraordinary ways of God which will bring salvation for God's people. Joseph trusts the word of God's messenger: he abandons his own plans and lives by faith in God.

If we try to harmonise the different gospel accounts of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, we may lose some of the wondrous mystery of the feast we celebrate. If, on the other hand, we attend to the awesome truth that God is with us, then we might be more attentive to how we are with one another. We may also come to acknowledge our presence or "being-with" as a precious Christmas gift. Those who distance themselves from the community of life run the risk of succumbing to fear and of losing the joy in living. Acceptance of the truth that God is with us has the potential to drive out fear and to draw us into the deepest mysteries of life.

Matthew 1:18-24 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel commanded him; he took her as his wife.

ST ALIPIUS PARISH — BALLARAT EAST & BUNINYONG FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT — YEAR A, SUNDAY 22ND DECEMBER, 2019

*Our parish is committed to the safety, wellbeing and dignity
of all children and vulnerable adults.*

St Alipius' Parish Church
82 Victoria Street, BALLARAT EAST 3350

SS Peter & Paul's Church
701 Fiskens St, BUNINYONG

Contact Details

Parish Office: 84 Victoria Street, Ballarat East 3350

Hours: 9.30am - 1.30pm Tues, Thurs, Fri **SAP Liturgy email:** sapliturgy@gmail.com

Telephone: 5332 6611 **SAP Liturgy website:** www.sapliturgy.net.au

Email: ballarateast@ballarat.catholic.org.au **Parish Website:** www.ballarat.catholic.org.au

Clergy and Staff

Priests: Frs Justin Driscoll, Jorge De Chavez OSJ, Vincent Pham Van Long CSsR

Visiting Priests: Frs Dan Arundell and Barry Ryan

Parish Coordinator: Lucy O'Beirne

Child Safety Officer: Roxanne Leed

Finance Officer: Kerrie McTigue

Funeral Ministry: Kathy Curran & Carmel Flynn

Masses This Week

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| Tuesday, 24th December | 6.00 pm | Christmas Vigil, St Alipius' Church |
| | 7.00 pm | Christmas Vigil, Ss Peter & Paul's Church |
| | 8.00 pm | Christmas Vigil, St Alipius' Church |
| Wednesday, 25th December | 9.00 am | Christmas Day Mass, St Alipius' Church |
| Friday, 27th December | 9.30 am | St. Alipius' Church |

Next Weekend's Masses

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| St Alipius' Church, Ballarat East | Saturday | 28th | December | 6.00 pm |
| | Sunday | 29th | December | 9.00 am |
| SS Peter & Paul's Church, Buninyong | Sunday | 29th | December | 10.30 am |

Feast : The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph — Year A

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| Readings | First: | Sirach | 3:2-6, 12-14 |
| | Second: | Colossians | 3:12-21 |
| | Gospel: | Matthew | 2:13-15, 19-23 |

Baptisms: Norah Brown, Sonny Brown, Owen Razbocan, Lucy Razbocan

Recent Deaths: Anna Carr, Leon Kelly, Dennis Hishon, Doreen O'Brien

Anniversaries:

We pray for Kateri Byrne, Pat Hogan, Cathy Jones and Peter Martin and all who are unwell

What's on for Advent that can help us prepare for Christmas?

Anglican Cathedral Service of Lessons & Carols Sunday December 22nd 7.00 pm

Giving Tree Thank you!

Thank you to all those who have been able to generously offer a gift or two to people within our parish who are enduring hardship/disadvantage or are living in aged care. Over 180 gift tags were made available. Please note that any gifts not returned by Sunday Mass on 22nd December will need to be personally delivered by parishioners. Many thanks to Ruby Dean and Margaret McCarty who have kindly coordinated this project.

St Vincent de Paul Society Christmas Appeal

Please help us to "Help A Family Celebrate Christmas", this year. Envelopes available at the Piety Stall. All donations are used in the Ballarat area; amounts over \$2.00 are tax deductible.

SVDP Christmas Cards & Calendars — St Alipius' Piety Stall

Christmas cards (\$5 for 8 cards) and 2020 Columban calendars (\$9 each) available.

Ballarat Diocese Annual Christmas Appeal

At Christmas Masses in the Diocese of Ballarat, all are invited to contribute to a special collection that seeks to respond to some of the many who seek assistance from us. Last year \$45,000 was contributed by those at Christmas Masses. St Alipius' Parish contributed \$2,509.45 to this amount. Envelopes are available on the church seats. Many thanks.

Christmas Masses

Christmas Eve: 6.00pm & 8.00pm at Ballarat East, 7.00pm at Buninyong
Christmas Day 9.00am Ballarat East

New Year's Day—Wednesday January 1st 2020, Mass at 9.30am St Alipius' Church

OLHC Parish Wendouree Christmas Day Lunch

OLHC Parish Wendouree are hosting lunch on Christmas Day in the Parish Hall, 482 Gillies Street, Wendouree from 12.00noon – 2.00pm. Transport is available. For bookings or further information phone 0419 975914 or email christmaslunchwendouree@gmail.com.

Counting Teams

This Week: **Team 9:** P. Saunders ©, M. Saunders
Next Week: **Team 10:** E. Wilson ©, C. Stewart

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| Parish: | Envelopes: | \$ 1374.70 | <i>Thank you to those who contributed to the collections last weekend</i> |
| | Loose: | \$ 300.00 | |
| | Direct Debits: | \$ 480.00 | |
| | | \$ 2154.70 | |

Presbytery: \$ 763.00

Parish Pastoral Council Discernment gathering

Following the nomination of parishioners for membership of a Parish Pastoral Council for St Alipius' Parish, those nominated were invited to attend a discernment gathering on Monday evening December 16th. Some of the those nominated declined the invitation, some didn't respond. The gathering was attended by John Clonan, Jason & Terresa Fletcher, Brett Holloway, Sharon McCartin, Olivia McKeegan, Martin McGettigan, Kristen Murray, Paul & Lucy O'Beirne, Cathy Prunty, Clare Stewart, Margaret Tuddenham, Fr Justin and Rachel McLoughlin IBVM who facilitated this first gathering at which those nominated introduced themselves and their response to being nominated by parishioners.

The gathering explored Pope Francis' vision for a Synodal Church, a Church on the journey together which is expressed in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and his vision for parishes based on the hope of missionary creativity.

Pope Francis identifies 7 aspects of Parish life: *an environment for hearing God's Word, growth in Christian life, dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship, and celebration.*

The gathering participated in discernment exercise to identify the fruits of the Spirit in St Alipius' Parish. Rather than adopt an existing model of Parish Council, the group will continue meet and be facilitated by Rachel McLoughlin over the first half of 2020 to discern the identity and mission of the Parish and the most appropriate leadership structure.

Ss Peter & Paul's Cuppa Roster for 2020

Anyone interested in joining the roster for organisation of morning tea after 10:30 Masses at Buninyong throughout 2020 please see John or Geraldine White after Mass. There will be Christmas morning tea after 9am Mass this Sunday. All welcome.

Making a Scene at Christmas — all wrapped up

Over five days, the MASAC nativity display saw over 1000 school children and over 300 adults enjoy the beautiful and intriguing nativity items displayed in Ss Peter & Paul's Church and hall. Visitors came from the Catholic, Anglican, Uniting and Church of Christ traditions as well as the general public; some even travelled from Melbourne. Many thanks to Fr Andrew Hayes, Fiona Tonkin and Kay Paton for sharing this marvellous display and to all those people who offered support from the church communities.

Plenary Council 2020 — Nominations for Delegates

Bishop Paul in inviting us to nominate delegates from our dioceses from the sessions of the Australian Plenary Council to be held in 2020 and 2021. Please collect a copy of Bishop Paul's letter in the church foyer or via www.ballarat.catholic.org.au. Nominations need to reach Bishop Paul by **Friday, 7th February, 2020.**

Parish Office Closure over Christmas and January

During closure of the parish office, please call the **Cathedral office** on **5331 2933** for any urgent matters. As a shared bulletin will be available, you are welcome to also leave any requests with the Cathedral office staff. The St Alipius' parish office will reopen on Tuesday, 28th January.