

WHAT'S NEXT?

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 [MW20-48]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 27 December 2020

After Christmas ... what's next?

- the presents are opened
the food's eaten
the visitors are gone ...
- the tree's still there, though it looks a bit tired
the lights still flash, but seem somehow duller
Christmas is all too quickly over for another year

In the gospel reading we've just heard

- after the joy of a baby's birth
and visits from shepherds and foreign travellers
- Jesus' family have a rude awakening
Christmas is over all too quickly for them too

What's next?

- for Jesus and his family there's another trip
this one more hurried and fraught with danger

What's next for us ...?

- I came across this poem

One Day After Christmas

Author Unknown

*It's one day after Christmas
I'm crabby and I'm broke.
I'm so full of ham and fruitcake
I think I'm gonna croak.*

*It's nice to see the relatives
I wonder when they'll leave.
They've been camping in my bathroom
since early Christmas Eve.*

*They're eating everything in sight
and sleeping in my bed.
I've been sacked out in the basement
with my beagle, Fred.*

*I love the decorations,
and the sleigh bells in the snow
But I wish those pesky relatives
would take their kids and go.*

*Now they're in a free-for-all,
the girls against the boys.
They're fighting over boxes
'cause they're bored with all their toys*

*My mother-in-law is snoring
in my favourite TV chair.
Those kids are stringing lights on her
and tinseling her hair*

*I oughta wake her up
before the fireworks begin.
But I wanna see those blue sparks fly
when they plug her in.*

What's next?

- back into the real world!
where there is fear, anger, jealousy, violence
- the love of God is no good if it stays in a 'Christmas card scene'
Jesus, even a few days old, is thrust "into the world"
with all its slip ups and shortcomings

It's a reminder that God comes into a world that is not all sweetness and light

- a world of sorrow, as well as joy
God does not avoid it
in fact at not even a month old, God is in the middle of it

So what's next?

- what's next is God's love, having moved out from the relative security of the stable
begins to work in us and through us
- we are called afresh to work towards realising the promised peace and goodwill
we are called to share the blessings of Christmas

We see something of that in the traditions surrounding this day

- December 26, 'Boxing Day'

Does anyone know why it is called 'Boxing Day'?

Well, here's what I managed to discover ...

Despite the lively images suggested by the name, it has nothing to do with pugilistic expositions between tanked-up family members. Likewise, it does not gain its name from the overpowering need to rid the house of an excess of wrappings and mountains of now useless cardboard boxes the day after St. Nick arrived to turn a perfectly charming and orderly home into a maelstrom of discarded tissue paper. The name also has nothing to do with returning unwanted gifts to the stores they came from.

Although there is general agreement that the holiday is of British origin and it has to do with giving presents to the less fortunate, there is still dispute as to how the name came about.

At various times, the following "origins" have been loudly asserted as the correct one:

Centuries ago, ordinary members of the merchant class gave boxes of food and fruit to trades people and servants the day after Christmas in an ancient form of Yuletide tip.

These gifts were an expression of gratitude to those who worked for them, in much the same way that one might now give the paper girl or boy a gift at Christmastime or the boss give a 'Christmas bonus'. Those long-ago gifts were done up in boxes, hence the day coming to be known as "Boxing Day."

Many years ago, on the day after Christmas, servants in Britain carried boxes to their masters when they arrived for the day's work. It was a tradition that on this day all employers would put coins in the boxes as a special end-of-the-year gift. In a closely-related version of this explanation, apprentices and servants would on that day get to smash open small earthenware boxes left for them by their masters. These boxes would house small sums of money specifically left for them.

Boxes in churches for seasonal donations to the needy were opened on Christmas Day, and the contents distributed by the clergy the following day. The contents of this alms box originated with the ordinary folks in the parish who were under no direct obligation to provide anything at all and were certainly not tied to the recipients by a employer/employee relationship. In this case, the "box" in "Boxing Day" comes from that one gigantic lockbox the donations were left in.

Whatever theory you go with, it's all to do with someone sharing

- from their abundance of the good things of life
sharing some of their blessings
- and so 'Christmas' begins to spread
God shares himself with people
- arriving with the fanfare of angels but not much else
not even having time to catch his breath
before being hurried off into the fickle world ...

Because that's what's next

- the baby in the manger did not stay in the manger
and did not stay a baby!
- the good news has come and is moving and growing
and we are called to be part of it

What's next?

- we are on that road too, with the infant Saviour,
taking the good news out into the world

A reflection by Ann Weems titled: 'The Cross in the Manger'

The Cross in the Manger

*If there is no cross in the manger,
there is no Christmas.*

*If the Babe doesn't become the Adult,
there is no Bethlehem star.*

*If there is no commitment in us,
there are no wise men searching.*

*If we offer no cup of cold water,
there is no gold, no frankincense, no myrrh.*

*If there is no praising God's name,
there are no angels singing.*

If there is no spirit of alleluia,
 there are no shepherds watching.
If there is no standing up, no speaking out, no risk,
 there is no Herod, no flight into Egypt.
If there is no room in our inn,
 then "Merry Christmas" mocks the Christ Child,
 and the Holy Family is just a holiday card,
 and God will loathe our feasts and festivals.
For if there is no reconciliation,
 we cannot call Christ "Prince of Peace."
If there is no goodwill toward others,
 it can all be packed away in boxes for another year.
If there is no forgiveness in us,
 there is no cause for celebration.
If we cannot go now even unto Golgotha,
 there is no Christmas in us.
If Christmas is not **now**,
 If Christ is not born into the everyday present,
 then what is all the **noise** about?

What's next is for us to show, in our words and in our deeds
- in how we live and relate to others
 just what all the *noise* is about