****

**Sunday 24 December 2023 to**

**Sunday 31 December 2023**

****

Sunday 24 December 2023

**Miracles we do immediately; impossibilities take a little longer**

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

***For nothing will be impossible with God (Luke 1:37).***

Read [Luke 1:26–38](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3A26%E2%80%9338&version=NRSVUE)

As I try to insert myself into this story of an angel appearing to a young woman and ‘announcing’ that she will become pregnant, the word ‘impossible’ jumps right out at me. That is precisely what we are asked to believe happens here: the absolute impossible. Yet, if we think about our lives, often it can feel as though when we have requested the impossible, we have not received it. Cancers have not been healed, sight has not been restored, and wars continue to spread.

And yet, when we consider what we celebrate at Christmas – God, the creator and sustainer of all things, becoming human – I think we can see that tonight, Christmas Eve, the most impossible thing has happened: God has stepped into all those impossible situations – cancers, blindness, wars – and has entered into them with us. Tonight, we sit and look up at the night sky to see that God has come to be here with us – it is as if the stars are like little pinholes in the universe through which the eternal Father peeks in to see his Son born as one of us. That’s not just impossible, but for us, it's inconceivable (pardon the pun). Imagine you are Mary holding onto the Son of God for the first time; imagine you are Joseph trying to take in what has just happened.

And then remember you are a Mary or a Joseph, for whom God has done the impossible and entered into your life.

***Lord Jesus, we cannot imagine what it was like for you to enter into this world, and yet, with the excitement of first-time parents, we thank you. Help me to believe in the impossible and revel in every glimpse of you breaking into our world. Amen.***

*Tim Castle-Schmidt is the pastor of Onkaparinga Lutheran Parish in the Adelaide Hills. After spending many years as a teacher in Lutheran schools, he finally listened to God’s call to the pastoral ministry. Tim is passionate about social justice and engaging the church with contemporary society. Tim shares his life with Fiona, Miranda, a Jack Russell called Otto and 11 chooks. By his own admission, Tim is a broken man. Broken in body, mind and spirit, he is learning that God is at work in and through human brokenness. For while God has not ‘fixed’ him, God continues to work through his brokenness to connect with the world.*

Monday 25 December 2023

**What a night!**

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

***When they saw this, they made known what had been told to them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them (Luke 2:17,18).***

Read [Luke 2:8–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A+8%E2%80%9320+&version=NIVUK)

Did you sleep well last night, on Christmas Eve, the night the Saviour was born? I don’t reckon the shepherds there that night would have slept much.

Imagine, for a second, that you were one of those shepherds; do you think you would have slept when you returned from the stable? Or maybe you didn’t even try, curling up in some hay in the corner, not wanting to miss a moment of this precious child’s first day. Because I reckon it would have been a pretty ordinary sleep that anyone got that night.

Then I wonder how well Jesus slept. The first night as a human, totally dependent on Mary and Joseph, totally human, and yet physically unable to even tell anyone he was also totally God – the God of the universe unable to speak!

As we unpack the Christmas story yet again, every year, I am drawn to think deeply about Jesus becoming human. And then I think about those shepherds who only knew him as human. And yet they saw the star and the singing angels. God revealed to them something that no one else knew ... all on that night.

So, I wonder what they did the following morning? They probably went back to their sheep and wondered what had happened.

Maybe that’s what we’re supposed to do: go back to our lives knowing that, on that special night, God has entered our world and climbed into our skin. Now, that would be life-changing. What a night!

***Lord Jesus, as we come to terms with your birth at Christmas, remind us to take this best of news back into our ordinary lives so that we might maintain our surprise and joy. Amen.***

Tuesday 26 December 2023

**Giving up the glorious power**

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

***May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, so that you may have all endurance and patience (Colossians 1:11).***

Read [Colossians 1:1–14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+1%3A1%E2%80%9314++++++&version=NRSVUE)

To think about Jesus’ birth is to think of the power God gave up to enter into time and space. This is God’s glorious power: he rescinded power in order to know what it means to be human, so he could be ‘born of a woman’ and suffer like each and every human as one who is (relatively) ‘powerless’. This is the glorious power that Paul speaks of, the power to join creation in being limited.

Now, that is some power! And, at Christmas time, we recall that God used the power to give up being God so that he could climb into human skin. This is what happens at Christmas; we celebrate God giving up ‘being God’ so that he could be human, like you and me.

And that’s the same power that Paul says we can draw upon to live as new people: people who can love and serve the world just as Jesus did; in fact, people through whom Jesus continues to love and serve the world.

Do you know that glorious power that Jesus gave up to become human? That is the same power you and I receive to live as redeemed people, as we live with the power to forgive others, to love the unlovable and care for the little, the least, the lost and the last.

What a glorious power that we are made strong by and with. May you continue to ponder the depths of Christmas as Jesus’ glorious power works its way in and through you.

***Lord Jesus, in giving up some of your power, you became one of us. Help us to be ready to let go of our power over others and use it to serve. Amen.***

Wednesday 27 December 2023

**Fleshly reconciliation**

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

***And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death (Colossians 1:21,22).***

Read [Colossians 1:15–23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+1%3A15%E2%80%9323++++&version=NRSVUE)

How are your Christmas celebrations going? Do you feel that you were once estranged from and hostile towards God? Because you were. In fact, you probably have been again in the last couple of days in your fleshly body, feeling the post-Christmas blues as you return from the joy of Christmas.

I find it mind-blowing that Paul says Jesus has reconciled our estrangement, hostility and evil deeds in his fleshly body. His flesh and blood reconcile us to God and one another so that we can live a new life with him in our flesh. Therefore, reconciliation (or salvation, the phrase often used) is not just a spiritual thing and something that we will only receive in the resurrection, but something we are given now. It is physical and achieved through Jesus’ fleshly body.

And Jesus continues reconciling us with his physical body, which we receive in the Lord’s Supper. Christmas is book-ended with Easter, with the last book on the shelf being the Lord’s Supper. It frees us to live loving lives, working for reconciliation now so that we can live the reconciling life with Jesus, working reconciliation through us. And all because God’s eternal Son enters into our world at Christmas.

***Jesus, as we continue pondering what happened on that first Christmas, help us to recognise that we continue to be reconciled physically and that you remain with us even today. May we also learn to walk as your physical body so we may experience reconciliation and bring reconciliation to this world. Amen.***

Thursday 28 December 2023

**Withstanding suffering? A Christmas message?**

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

***For this I toil and strive with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me (Colossians 1:29).***

Read [Colossians 1:24–2:7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+1%3A24+%E2%80%93+2%3A7+&version=NRSVUE)

On this, the fourth day of Christmas, the church typically commemorates the Slaughter of the Innocents, as Herod unleashed his vengeance following news that a new king had been born by ordering the execution of all male children who were two years old and under in the vicinity of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16–18).

As I write this, I am overcome with grief as I consider the slaughter of innocent children in Palestine in an equally senseless act of revenge. And yet, as I read from Paul’s letter to the Colossian church, I sense that God inspires us with energy to confront evil and withstand suffering for the sake of the world.

While we will never understand how humans can inflict such wanton cruelty on others, we can, hopefully, learn to look for Jesus among the suffering and recognise that Jesus is present here, today, in the world’s suffering. In becoming human, Jesus takes on all of our humanity – including the very worst – so that our worst can be redeemed.

As we continue through this first week after Christmas 2023, may we, like Paul, be inspired and energised to withstand suffering so that we can confront the evil in our world, knowing that the Prince of Peace has taken it all on in his own flesh, both on the cross and in his body, the church (you and me). May we live in this inspiration, and may it lead us into the New Year as we prepare to confront evil and withstand suffering for the sake of the world.

***Lord, you work through all things to bring about your purposes. Work in us and in and through all our circumstances so that you may be born anew every day in this dark and troubled world. Amen.***

Friday 29 December 2023

**The fullness of the deity dwells bodily**

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

***For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority (Colossians 2:9,10).***

Read [Colossians 2:8–23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+2%3A8%E2%80%9323&version=NRSVUE)

This week, we have been reflecting on the humanness of Jesus and pondering what that means for those of us who are now part of his body. But here, in Colossians 2, Paul equally asserts Jesus’ divinity: ‘for in him the whole fullness of the deity *dwells bodily*’. Jesus’ divinity is just as important as his humanity, and, in both Jesus’ humanity and divinity, he is the head of every leader. Here, Paul pulls together the importance of Jesus’ two natures, and then in verses 16–19, he goes on to explain the consequences of this.

Those of us who are the body of Christ are freed to take on leadership in the world and allow Jesus to lead through us. But even more radical than that, Jesus rules through all leaders, sometimes even through evil leaders. And yet, it is our responsibility (and privilege) to discern the intent and direction of human leaders so that we don’t obey them blindly but are empowered as Jesus’ body to hold them to account.

May God work in us and through us as we help all leaders to make good choices for all humanity.

***Lord Jesus, in you, the fullness of the deity dwells bodily, and yet we are your body. Work through us so that we may cause our leaders to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with you. Amen.***

Saturday 30 December 2023

**Every day is Christmas**

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

***He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord (Psalm 148:14)!***

Read [Psalm 148](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+148&version=NRSVUE)

This week, the first week after Christmas, we have been considering the miracle of God entering time and space as a human and what it means. As we round off the week, let us do so and celebrate the mystery of God in the flesh.

As the psalmist declares, ‘Praise the Lord!’ for he has not only created all that is but has entered into creation to become one with it. And if God is one with creation, then new life is not only possible, but it is ours to enjoy now. As our Christmas celebrations continue, may we live with every day being Christmas because Jesus, the Son of God, who was also a vulnerable baby, came to give us life and to remain with us in life ... forever.

***Lord Jesus, may we never grow tired of pondering the miracle of you becoming human. Help us to carry that with us every moment and let it grow our trust in you. Amen.***

Sunday 31 December 2023

**A promise fulfilled**

by Eden Bishop

***And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ (Luke 2:26).***

Read [Luke 2:22–40](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A22%E2%80%9340++&version=NRSVUE)

When I was a child, the time of year that I would wait the most for was Christmas. It had many exciting draws: it was in the middle of the summer holidays (so no school!), we got to set up the Christmas tree and listen to lots of Christmas music, it signalled that my birthday was drawing near, and of course, what child would not be excited about presents? As a kid, it feels like you are waiting forever for Christmas time to come around, no matter how patient you try to be.

A child waiting for Christmas is a little bit like Simeon waiting for the greatest gift of all: the Messiah. Similar to how our calendars and pre-Christmas routines act as a signal or promise to us as children of presents, Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would get to see the Messiah before he died. Each year, we get to partake in a little reminder of how Simeon – and all of Israel – waited for the coming of the Messiah, and this reminds us of how we wait for the return of Jesus.

This text also reminds us that God is faithful and fulfils his promises. Simeon does get to see the Messiah before he dies. We can be assured that Jesus will come again.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the joyful fulfilment of your promise to your servant, Simeon. Please fulfil your promise of coming again to us, your faithful servants. Amen.***

*Eden Bishop lives in Adelaide and is a member at St Paul Blair Athol. She attends the University of Adelaide and is in the final year of her Advanced Economics degree. Eden enjoys reading (particularly The Lord of the Rings), playing the piano in church, knitting and learning fun facts about dinosaurs.*