

## Waiting

Isaiah 7:14-16

Luke 1:26-38

This year we decided to do something a little different, and so instead of beginning Advent with scripture predictions about the end time, we've chosen instead to read about ... two women who are going to have babies. And I know it will amaze you, but this is one time when I am very happy with the Good News version of a passage. The passage in Isaiah comes close to the original text: a young woman who is pregnant will have a son, and will name him Immanuel. That's a young woman who is already pregnant. In all likelihood, the young woman is Isaiah's wife. It was a form of prophecy, a way of speaking God's word, to give significant names to the prophet's children. And the name???? We all know what Immanuel means, don't we? Every year at Christmastime we repeat the references to Emmanuel or Immanuel, and know that it means "God is with us".

If you take the time to read the very lengthy footnote in the Good News Bible about this particular passage you will see that the word in the original Hebrew does not mean "virgin". In that sense, Isaiah is not predicting a miraculous birth, though later translations changed that. But, isn't every birth miraculous? Isn't the gift of new life always a miracle? It's also a reminder that God is indeed with us. Every baby comes with that message: God is with us, or as some wag put it: every newborn baby is God's opinion that the world should go on. Babies are an affirmation of life, and an affirmation of God's interest and investment in us. Isaiah's prophecy, which was fulfilled in the immediate future, not some thousand years later, was an affirmation and statement of God's interest in the circumstances of the people, and an assurance that the future held great promise. They were people struggling with their life situation, and the prophet was directed

by God, to bring them words of comfort and words of joy.

When we turn to the Gospel According to Luke, we find an even more marvellous story. Even more miraculous dimensions have been added. Luke lives in the era of Caesar, and Caesar has claimed for himself a miraculous, virgin birth. Luke is convinced that Jesus is every bit as special as Caesar - in fact, even more special - and so he embellishes the birth of this special baby.

Those details aren't what really matters. What matters is that we take this time each year to prepare for a special birth, a special celebration, and renew our awareness that God is very much involved in our lives and our world, and that God is inviting us to participate in that involvement. God doesn't stay outside. God isn't watching 'from a distance.' God is with us in all that we do.

This is Advent, a time which symbolises waiting for us. Pregnancy is also a time of waiting, and for most a time of hope. We understand the waiting, because waiting is such a part of our lives: we may wait in fear of the unknown, we may wait for expectations to bear fruit, we may wait to see justice done, we may wait anxiously at the bedside of loved ones for some change, for some sign of hope, of life, of forgiveness, we wait in this world when those we love have left it, we wait for test results, we wait for news of employment, we wait too for new birth, of our own child, of grandchildren, of great-grandchildren, of nieces and nephews, of dreams, we wait for a home to be built or renovated, we wait for expected parcels, we wait for family and friends to arrive. We wait in darkness, we wait in anxious fear, we wait in hope, we wait in the light of faith, and in all of our waiting there is anticipation.

And so we begin this season of Advent, this time of waiting, waiting ultimately for the prince of peace, for the physical sign that

God is indeed with us. And to help us wait, we have the stories of two young women, each pregnant or about to become pregnant, each a willing partner in God's plan for them, each willing to wait and to say yes, to the waiting and to what lies beyond the waiting.

They invite us to wait, to hope, and to respond to God's invitation with an equally willing and totally committed 'yes', to the waiting, to the birthing, and to whatever lies beyond. Thanks be to God. Amen.