

Christmas in the gospel of Luke has a lot to answer for.

Christmas in Luke contains most of our childhood Christmas memories. Luke's Christmas story is the stuff of carols; o little town of Bethlehem; away in a manger; while shepherds watched; and hark the herald angels sing.

And so it's easy to decide Luke's Christmas is a story from our childhood. It's for kids. It's for those who like carols and a manger and come all ye faithful.

Most of us like to wrap new born babies in swaddling cloth. We like to buy cute tiny little booties. We like to picture a glowing mother and a proud father. But it's too easy for happy families to become cosy families, at the expense of the poor and the rough looking.

Do that, and you miss the cold, hard reality that is Luke's Christmas story.

Because in Luke, the first visitors to Jesus are shepherds. Actually, that the only visitors to baby Jesus in Luke are shepherds.

And these shepherds visit from outdoors.

If you look after sheep outdoors, then you probably look and live a bit rough

You sleep rough; You tend to shave less and smell a bit more.

So Luke's Christmas offers these rough, unshaven, smelly men trampling round a baby Jesus.

It's a theme that will stay with Jesus throughout his life. He will eat meals with tax collectors and have his feet massaged by prostitutes. He'll earn the anger of religious people because he relates to all types – family and rough shepherd, middle class and poor.

That's the Christmas in Luke.

Some of you would rather have **Mark's Christmas**.

Mark is in a hurry. Mark has no Christmas. No baby and no manger. Mark hurries to an adult Jesus, striding out of Nazereth, ready to change the world.

Some of you are like Mark here today. Hurry up Steve, I'm only here this Christmas to please my family. Hurry up Steve, there's 20 people coming for Christmas dinner. Hurry up Steve, there's a Boxing Day holiday and a beach beckoning at Kaiteriteri.

So you'll like Mark's Christmas. Cut to the chase. Skip the carols.

But then, what do you do with Mark's adult Jesus? "The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good news." What do you do with that on the Boxing day beach? "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of people" Imagine hearing that across the waters at Kaiteriteri.

Because Jesus in Mark addresses us as adults. You want to hurry past Christmas. You want to leave behind the childhood carols. You want to grow up. Great. "Because the kingdom of God is near. So get involved."

Jesus never came to give us some Christmas carols. He never came to start a new religion or a different way of being bored on Sunday morning at church.

Jesus did what we all do. He looked around his world and said: this is not good. People are starving. The environment is being polluted. People are disconnected from love.

We need to change our ways. We need to change our lifestyles and behaviours and the way we treat people. We need to repent.

We need to birth a political and social and economic and artistic and intellectual and spiritual revolution that will give birth to a whole new world. That's the Kingdom of God.

That's Mark's Christmas. You want to be adult. Great. "Because the kingdom of God is near. So get involved."

So what about **Matthew's Christmas**?

At least that's got a carol, We three kings of orientate are. Some wise men coming from the East.

Which means that Matthew's put some foreigners into Christmas. Some people from the Middle East. Some Arabs. Some people, who might, according to Bob Clarkson. Be terrorists. There's no "us and them" in Matthew's Christmas. Jesus becomes bigger than a Jewish story.

Which is good news for us here in New Zealand today. This Kingdom, this political and social and economic and artistic and intellectual and spiritual revolution that will give birth to a whole new world, it's not Jewish. There should be no us and them in the Kingdom. We have to love one another as Jesus first loved us.

Which leaves us with **John's Christmas**.

John, also, like Mark, has no carols and no manager. John's Christmas starts in the clouds. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God."

But then John grounds Jesus. The word became flesh. God refuses to stay white and fluffy, the man upstairs, in the clouds.

Instead God comes as human body. God as flesh and blood, skin and bone. Or like this poem.¹

It was the first Christmas and...

God giggled

God farted

God burped

God gurgled

God needed a cuddle

God was a baby...

Christmas reminds us:

That we don't have to find God – he finds us in our humanity –

We don't have to go up - he came down

God became one of us...

¹ By James Hawes on <http://www.sundaypapers.org.uk/?p=325>

That's John's Christmas.

And so in John 1:12: "yet to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

What will we do with Jesus this Christmas?

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4 different tellings of the Christmas story: Luke, Mark, Matthew and John.

All birth's have different tellings. My memories and telling of the birth of our first child, Shannon, is quite different from the memory and the telling of Lynne, the birthing mother, which is quite different from the memory and the telling of the family present, which is quite different from memory and the telling of the family absent.

All births have different tellings. But the birth of Shannon changed our lives. It became impossible to pretend a baby Shannon did not exist.

It's even more impossible to pretend the baby Jesus does not exist. 2000 years and this birth still won't go away. All of us have to wrestle with the question: What will do with the Christmas Jesus?

Will we receive him? Will we believe in his name? In doing that, will we gain the right to become children of God? Will we repent of the way our lifestyles harm our relationships with God and with people and the creation? Will we choose to participate in the Kingdom, Jesus dream of new world?

You might have done that in this church 10 or 20 or 40 years ago. But the challenge still remains. God's Kingdom, God's dream for heaven on earth still demands our participation.

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Up the front we have a manger. We have 4 nappies: on each nappy is picture that was on the PPT: picture of Jesus in Luke, Jesus in Mark, Jesus in Matthew, Jesus in John. Invited, as a way of saying yes I believe OR yes I want to participate OR yes I want to continue to participate, to come and rip of a piece of nappy.

You might want to choose the Jesus that most challenges you.

Luke's Christmas and the challenge to relate to all types of people, no matter how rough looking or socially distasteful they are

Marks Christmas and the challenge of become an adult and participate in Gods' Kingdom dream.

Matthew's Christmas, Jesus bigger than a Jewish story and the challenge to love one another, irrespective of skin colour, as Jesus first loved us.

John's Christmas, God one of us. Not a fluffy, harp playing man living in the clouds, but a God who giggles, farts, burps and gurgles.

We are going to sing. As we sing. Invited to come and to rip off a piece of nappy from the manger. Take Jesus into your Christmas.