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Jesus is not Santa Claus

By Revd Annette Cater



Last year I was given a snow globe. Inside the globe is a kneeling Santa Claus, his hat on the ground beside him and his hands together in a gesture of prayer. Santa leans slightly forward and his eyes are focused on something small that is wrapped up in front of him. It is a gift. The best gift of all - a child lying in a manger wrapped in a blanket.

This snow globe has one more adornment. Besides the obligatory snow, it plays music when you wind it up. If you were to sing along to the familiar tune, your words would be

*O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.*

I am not in much of an adoring mood. To be blunt, I am quite frustrated. This advent season with its familiar themes of waiting and preparing are cutting a little close to the bone. And I suspect that in Christchurch where I find myself I am probably not alone.

We wait. We prepare. We get hopeful. We ask are we there yet. We try being polite. We try being assertive. We try honesty. We try denial.

We try anger. We try bargaining. We try pretending that we are fine with it. We try to find silver linings. We try withdrawal. The list goes on.

And that's just my prayer life. Don't get me started on insurance, diocesan restructures, parish viability and family life.

O come let us adore him. Yeah right!

Are you shocked? Should an Anglican priest even admit that, let alone commit it to paper? Believe me, even as I do I'm still a little concerned that I'll need to add "we feel guilty" to the list above. Maybe it's already implied.

But given that you are reading this now we can both presume that I haven't been scratched off any gift lists yet.

When I was given the snow globe, I laughed. The parish that I'm vicar of is called St Nicholas (not many of those around) and so I'd finally lifted my personal ban on Santa Claus Christmas items. I have instead focused on calling them St. Nicholas figures and love the image of St Nicholas adoring the Christ child in the manger. The reason for the season or so the catch phrase goes.

A wise person once told me that God is big enough to even take the parts of us that we aren't able to love. And whilst my head gets that (for more on expressing the whole spectrum of human emotion to God, check out the psalms), I am just as fallible as the next person into adding strings masquerading as ribbon to what that love really means. Such as this: If God has called me to serve as an Ordained Anglican Priest (capitals intentional), then God will not abandon me in ministry. The particular passages that cradle this for me are Psalm 23 and Luke 11.

Into ministry I have with me the staff and rod of the Good Shepherd; and Jesus telling me to ask, search, and knock then I'll get a good gift from Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is even extra reassurance that if I ask for something good, I won't get something crappy in return.

What about my list above then?!?!?! Because I

wasn't expecting colleagues who find at the end of their training they can't get a job; to have multiple major earthquakes that have sped up the conversations about what constitutes a healthy parish; and I certainly didn't expect myself to find that none of my tactics - encouragement, empathy, leadership - would result in no discernible change in the outcome. Instead I find frustratingly that I have to watch. To wait. To prepare.

So back to that snow globe again. Well, from it I can see that Jesus isn't Santa Claus. But somewhere along the way if you are feeling like me we might have started to confuse the two. The Santa myth asserts that if we are good we get the presents that we want. If we are bad we get a lump of coal. Jesus on the other hand is God's son who promises the gift of eternal life to those who believe and follow. Jesus doesn't promise that we can avoid the whole gambit of human experience just by finding the right strategy to avoid the painful bits. Jesus experienced being fully human, even the painful bits and still managed to come out the other side intact. Resurrected in fact. So we will too. Even when it doesn't seem likely. Even when things aren't fair. Even when that the good gifts we expect to get resemble in our own opinion lumps of coal.

So when we have exhausted our lists of strategies. When we have given the gift of our tantrums, rants and silent treatment to God. When we lie exhausted in a heap on the floor and don't feel like we have anything left to give.

Come let us adore Christ the Lord. Not as a strategy. Not with conditions and small print.

Do it because we need to. Because it is our daily bread (Luke 11:3). Because it is green pastures, still waters and because it restores our souls (Psalm 23:2).

Kneel over the child in a manger, the gift of life. Remind yourself that this is where we will always be able to come back to. That we can because God loves us so much and made it possible. Look at the gift of Immanuel - God with us. Find the strength you need to get up. And wait. And prepare. And love.

Revd Annette Cater is Vicar of St Nicholas Church, South West Parish in Christchurch and is the Anglican Women's Studies Centre Link Representative for Christchurch.



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Samoan Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

By Revd Brenda Sio



Here are the Samoan pilgrims on the first day of the Convocation wearing their No.1 Uniform. From the front right, Spiritual Leader Pastor Nuuausala Siaosi, Malu Siaosi, Lafaialii Aiga Esera, Revd Brenda Sio, Pricilla Betham and in the back from the right Mataafa Keni Lesa, Team Leader Leota Kosi Latu and Tagaloa Mefi Tupou.

A pilgrim is described as one who journeys to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion or a person regarded as journeying to a future life. Eight such persons from the Independent State of Samoa made the journey on a Pilgrimage to Israel to attend the 25th Jerusalem House of Prayer for All Nations Convocation (JHOPFAN) in September. This is an annual event where people from different Nations come together to worship and pray in the twelve major languages of the world welcoming the Messiah back to the Mount of Olives. This year was special as it was the 25th Anniversary of the All Nations House of Prayer so around 2000 people from 175 Nations attended including eleven from American Samoa, and eleven Samoans from New Zealand and three from Australia. This Year's theme was "Preparing the Way for the King of Glory, We Enter His Gates With Thanksgiving" (Psalm 100:4)

Each day session of the Convocation began at 9am with worship and prayers led by teams from different nations. Since there were a variety of Speakers covering many topics related to the Theme and the purpose of the House of Prayer, it felt like this smorgasbord of information; explaining, enhancing, confirming, describing and connecting bible information and truths with the realities of life as we know it today and in the past. The three main things that stood out for me were:

◆ The Salvation and future of the Christians is closely tied to the Jews - God's Chosen people. We cannot do without them and we cannot say that we have replaced them in God's favour (Romans 1:16, Acts 15:13-18, Amos 9:11-15). We are the gentiles who have been grafted in because of their rejection of Jesus their Messiah, but the plan of God has not changed and will be fulfilled in accordance to His word and prophecies outlined in the Bible.

◆ The Watchmen on the Wall (Isaiah 62: 6-7, 10) "I have

posted Watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You will call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give Him no rest till He establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth". The House of Prayer is open 24/7 with people praying in Jerusalem and in their own Nations for the fulfillment of God's word in the earth and preparing the way for the King of Glory to return (Ps 24, 27) .

The 12 Gates and the nations connected to them (Ezekiel 48:30-35; Deu 32:8). We in the Pacific are part of the Golden gate or the Eastern Gate. We are the countries which were referred to as "the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) Tahiti being the official islands that mark the Good News reaching of the ends of the earth and Solomon Islands being the last country to receive the Gospel of the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Golden Gate is believed by the Jews to be the one through which the Messiah will come and this Gate has been closed for centuries

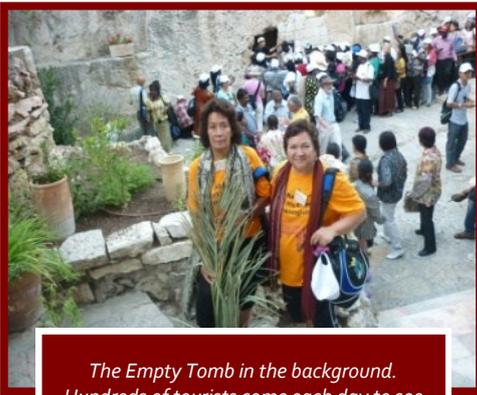
Prayer and thanksgiving were the highlight and central part of the whole Convocation. Worshiping to the playing of Harps and other instruments, singing in different languages and tongues.



Right: The pilgrims from American Samoa with Pastor Don and Hope Kruse leading the Worship for one of our Golden Gate Prayer sessions.

Left: Here the Samoan pilgrims are doing an item during the "Indigenous People's" presentation.





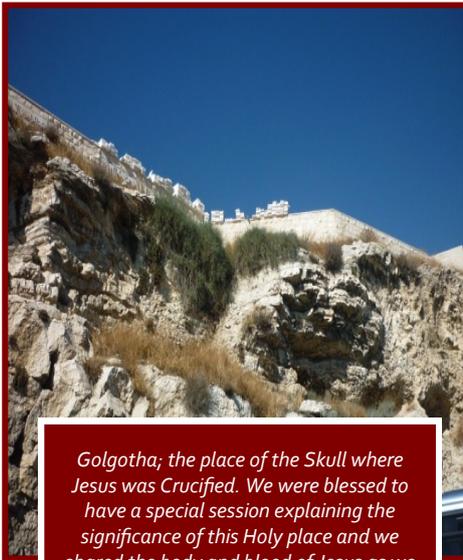
The Empty Tomb in the background. Hundreds of tourists come each day to see the Holy Land marks. He is Risen Indeed!

The blowing of the 'Shofar' the Ram's horn, had a distinct and out of this world sound. When you hear it you can imagine it is like the blowing of the Trumpets, the sound we will hear when our Messiah returns. Added to this was the sound of the Guitars and ukuleles of the Pacific and quite a few "Tiususu's" rang out as

well! The passion of the different nations in prayer, especially from countries where people are persecuted for their Faith, was both impressive and inspiring. It was the "norm" to see small groups of people holding hands and praying or singing praises to the Lord at any available time, outside in the grounds, in the Hotel lobby; anywhere and everywhere.

The Holy Land Experience : We traced and followed the footsteps

of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and visited as many sites mentioned in the Bible as we could. We visited Bethlehem where He was born, Nazareth where he grew up, and sites in Jerusalem where he had His Ministry and died. Following are some pictures showing the landmarks from our trip. These were like the Laughing Samoan's "I can't believe it" moments. You cry, you pray, you laugh, you hold your mouth and thank God for His goodness for bringing us to Israel.



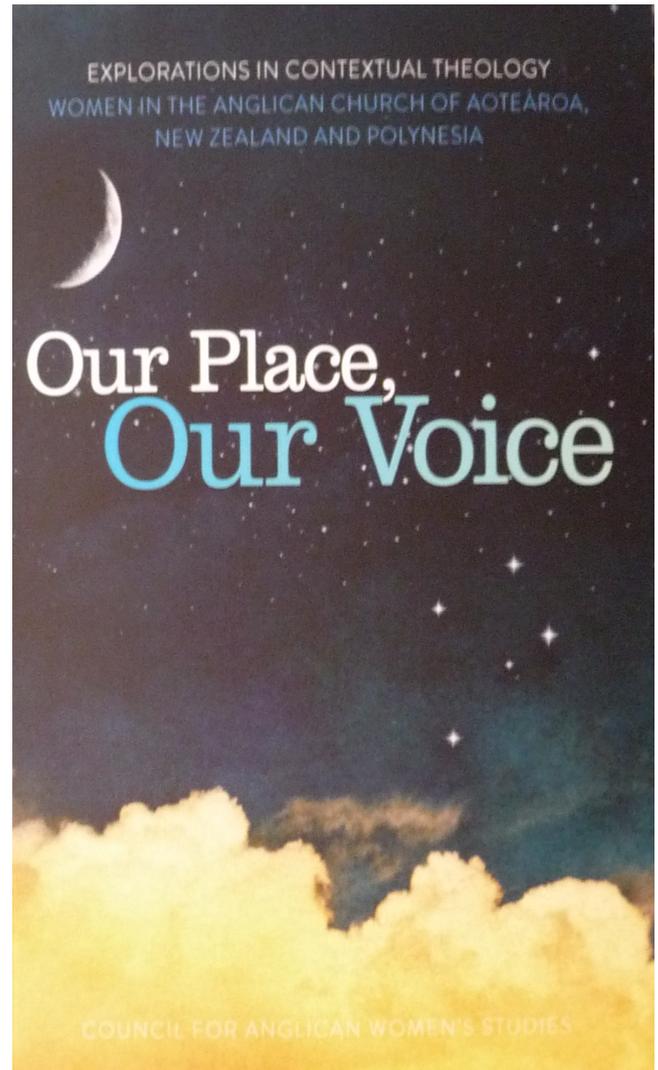
Golgotha; the place of the Skull where Jesus was Crucified. We were blessed to have a special session explaining the significance of this Holy place and we shared the body and blood of Jesus as we remembered and prayed for His Coming again.

This is only a Glimpse of what we saw and did. This trip reaffirmed my belief without a doubt that Jesus Christ is Lord. He died for the World so that they may have eternal Life in Him. He is Risen and He

lives in all of us who believe through His Holy Spirit. The Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob exists and is real today, yesterday and forever. Amen



The Baptism in the river Jordan as Jesus had been Baptized was the finale of the whole trip.



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The Centre for Anglican Women's Studies, commonly known as the **Women's Studies Centre** was set up to serve and to advance the interests and needs of the women of this Church particularly those undertaking Theological training.

The Link Representatives from each Diocese and Hui Amorangi have been chosen for their leadership ability to identify, gather, facilitate, resource and encourage women in their educational preparation for ministry whether lay or ordained. It is hoped that the Women's Studies Centre can continue to enjoy the support of each Diocese and Hui Amorangi in this endeavour.

The issue of increasing numbers of women in representative positions across the councils and committees of the Church is seen as a high priority and the practice of intentional mentoring by those already in national and international representative roles is seen as a good way to expose women of this church to fulfill their potential as leaders.

Ensuring that women's voices and stories are heard now and in the future is also one of our continued aims whether it be by traditional methods of publication or using more contemporary technologies like website publication. We remain optimistic that through continued support, the needs of women throughout this Province will be valued and recognized.



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EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER: *The Women's Studies Centre is committed to encouraging and enabling women's voices and perspectives from across the diversity of the Church to be shared more widely. We acknowledge that women's experiences of church differ considerably and that resultant theological perspectives also differ considerably. In general the WSC does not exercise editorial control, rather we welcome as many voices as are willing to contribute.*