

NORTH BALWYN UNITING CHURCH
CHRISTMAS DAY
SUNDAY 25 DECEMBER 2011
Rev. Anneke Oppewal

“Joy and Comfort to the World”

Little Jessica was born into a loving family with a loving community of Church and other friends around her. She was born in a city and a country that is considered one of the most livable environments in the world. For all accounts and purposes a bright future lies ahead of her.

But. Still. We all know that is not all that is needed for Jessica to grow up into the woman whose future potential still lies largely dormant in her little body and brain for the moment. More than any other mammal Jessica, like every human baby, will need care and support to develop into the best possible Jessica she can be. To herself and to the world.

For a moment I'd like you to imagine I've got all the positives, all the love, support and care available to Jessica, all the physical, mental and spiritual potential hidden in her body and brain in my right hand.

A hand overflowing with the wealth of promise and care. Tell me about those positives, the possibilities, the promise....

Just imagine. A hand soft and generous, loving, overflowing with care, bursting with possibilities and potential.

Now I'd like you to imagine, and tell me: what are the things that could come between Jessica and all those good things that could make her grow up into her best possible self?

For Jessica, fortunately, these bad things, these negatives, are reasonably under control.

If we look at the start in life of the Christ child however, a disproportionately large amount of those negatives are in evidence when he is born.

He is born in a stable far away from home, in an environment that is hardly suitable for a good and healthy (hygienic) start for a new born. His parents don't have the means to give him much of an education or well tell me about other disadvantages we know about?

And within the year a murderous king will be out to kill him.

In this world unfortunately there are more children who are born in situations like Jesus than like Jessica.

More children who have a bad start and little opportunity to catch up for it later.

Children are born in stables all over the world. If not worse.

Places with no or hardly any hygiene, support, safety, nourishment and care enough to give them the opportunity to develop into healthy grown ups - let alone mature adults who reach their mental

and spiritual potential.

Let's put all of that in my other hand. This is a hand full of sadness, of suffering, of anger, of despair and lost opportunities.

What does that look like?

A balled fist, knuckles white, nails digging into flesh, shaking with the effort of keeping upright, of not wanting to give up, furious with the desire to live, longing for a better life, for a future, for hope, for light. It is our world, as it is reaching out for love, for compassion, for peace, for joy.....

What happens at Christmas is this:

Look, the hand full of care and love, of light and life, comes and caresses that ball of pain open with love, eases the hurt back, brings hope in the middle of despair, whispers with the voice of angels in the dark: "Comfort and Joy, Comfort and Joy",
God has come to bring peace and healing.... for you.

Jesus came, as vulnerable as Jessica. He had two loving parents, just like Jessica. He had brothers and sisters too, just like Jessica. And probably grandparents and uncles and aunties to look after him and care for him. They raised him, they loved him, they cared for him.

Their love and care, as much as God's love and care, helped him to become a man in whom others recognised God. Their hands and God's hand caressed him into reaching his potential, into being all he could be, and more. And showing us what we can be, whatever our start or station in life.

Through him God reached out to others, people whose life was, for one reason or another, like a balled fist of pain and suffering and needed that loving hand soft with care.

Through him love and compassion reached out into the core of the existence way beyond those he encountered. His life brought hope, and inspiration to love.

Because he showed it is possible to love people back to life,
to care people back to health,
to nourish people back to peace,
to feed people back to joy.

He showed it is possible, a hand overflowing with goodness and compassion reaching out to us with the comfort and joy we need, the world needs, to open up and relax it into a better place.
Amen.