

TRINITY NEWS

Epiphany 1 First Glimpses of God and First Steps into Presence

A father recently repeated some words he'd heard me say in a sermon years ago to his 15-year-old daughter when she didn't get an exchange program spot: "God's answers are wiser than our prayers." I said those words over 25 years ago! I wonder what words Jesus heard from his mother and Joseph when he set out to come to the Jordan to begin his ministry? What big tears in his mother's eyes as he left with some mist in his own eyes as he took his first steps towards the Jordan. Mary had taught him to say prayers at night which may well have included a prayer he later used at the Cross from a Psalm: "Abba, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Ps.31:5). I have been writing my own spiritual autobiography, reflecting on my first glimpses of God. I was born at a time when Hitler was getting into his strident steps in Germany and beginning to make his presence felt. I was only a child a few days short of my 4th birthday when Kristallnacht, "The Night of the Smashing of Glass" in Jewish premises, houses and institutions began on November 9th 1938. I would know nothing of the burning of sacred books that ushered in the crushing of the Jewish people. I would know nothing of the wonderful collective civilization within Germany being systematically destroyed in the end by one of the most evil men who ever lived, Heinrich Himmler. He was systematically cruel in his objectives. I would know nothing of those things but they would impinge upon my story from far away and from a closer threat in Japan which would also flex its military muscle, surging through the Pacific in a very destructive way which in the end contributed nothing except some no doubt very valiant offspring from mostly enforced camp followers here. But they did get to the doorstep of my island continent down South in the Pacific Ocean.

I was filled with a sense of wonder from the start. I was never converted to any religion. I was taken to the parish church of John the Baptist to be baptized in my home town of Warren in New South Wales. The priests were dedicated and their love of the people was remembered for years after. I went to the little Warren Central School as a child and was taken there by my Uncle Jackie on my first day. I was too small to reach the drinking taps.

I had to leave my mother that day, the first love of my life. Her name was Mona Emily Rogers Falk that she had married my father when she was only 18. I arrived about one month before the due date marked by the busybodies of the town who routinely noted when people got married and marked it on the calendars behind the kitchen doors or wherever they kept them. Mona Emily married Arthur Edmond Jones the eldest son of his family. I think that he was a very fine

man in many ways. He had a bad temper and I can see now that he was hounded by the uncertainties he felt in himself at times. I think they were very much in love as much as they could be in those times. They had to work hard, they had little money and always struggled in some way. The small house in Chester Street was barely comfortable with dirt floors out the back. It was rather poky as a house I would think. But it was a home in a real sense. I was followed by Shirley, Barbara, Joyce and Esme over the years. I was brought up on stern principles of how to live life, how we might find our way. There were no prayers at meals and there was little attention to anything religious or spiritual. Mrs Essie Graham came round with a collection so that the parish priest could be paid and my mother would give a few shillings when she could. She sent me to the Sunday School because she thought I needed it as I was becoming a very naughty boy. I was really quite mild by today's standards I think in many ways whatever today's standards might be. A sense of the wonder of God's Presence accompanied me everywhere. It had been there since my birth. It was a presence that I knew was there all the time though couldn't quite reach out and touch it. But I knew it was there from the beginning and I have always known. I have never been beguiled by doubts about that personal reality. When I went to the Sunday school they gave me the names for this presence around me in Jesus the Christ the one who came from God and went to God. This gave it a name for me, the presence that I had always known. My story is more of a spiritual biography than anything else not because of what I became in my Christian journey. I became what I already was when I was only a toddler, when I was little boy going to school when I was trying to learn to spell words. One of my early fascinations was with words and that remains. I have recorded elsewhere that I used to read under the blankets at night with a torch. My mother would eventually sing out for me to go to sleep. She was the constant in my life. When I was a little older I walked down the hallway one day and I saw my mother stripped to the waist and I went past with a flushed face because I felt ashamed though I couldn't explain why I felt that way. But I had looked. She was also my protector and my guide and mentor in so many ways. This handsome bush woman did the washing every day by hand after boiling the copper to put the items in and then she would hang the washing on the line. She didn't like ironing much but she did it as she did all things that were necessary for our world. Years later I would preach in a cathedral on Mother's Day and say that I felt we expected far too much of her. A woman came up and told me that it was probably what she wanted to do and that it was in her heart to work for us, so that I shouldn't grieve about it. Sometimes people are helpful when they make unsolicited comments! Let us remember our beginnings to help focus our endings, "lest we forget."

Bishop Arthur Jones

NEXT SUNDAY'S READINGS:

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 96; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-22

THIS WEEK:

Wednesday. Group Discussion, 7:30p.m., Parish Office

Thursday. Midweek Eucharist, 10am, Chapel

TO PLAN: AGM: January 31st after the 9:30 service