

December 5th 2016

O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

This favourite Advent carol is a prayer for the first and second coming of Christ. It voices the longing of the people of Israel for the first coming of the Messiah. But it also voices the yearning of the present people of God – us – for the second coming of the Messiah to bring to fullness the history of redemption.



In her book 'the sacred meal, Nora Gallagher tells the story of a new bishop in Hawaii who began his ministry by driving to all the parishes in his vast diocese to meet his priests and parishioners.

He spent the hours driving from parish to parish listening to tapes on theology and the sacraments believing it was important to be an educated and informed bishop. And when he arrived at the church he would share what he had just been listening to with the priest and parishioners. From the looks on their faces this wasn't what they wanted from him, but he didn't know what else to do.

One day he saw ahead of him a shape on the road. Drawing closer he saw it was a turtle. He stopped the car, got out, picked up the turtle and placed it safely on the other side. As he continued visiting parishes he began to notice more turtles - of course they had always been there, but the bishop hadn't noticed them before.



Now he started keeping an eye out for them. After a while he stopped listening to the tapes because he might miss a turtle and he even started to notice the beauty of his surroundings. The bishop discovered that he was more relaxed and able to listen and be more attentive to the people

when he arrived a parish, this was what his priests and people wanted rather than his latest version of theology.

Like that Bishop we can miss seeing Emmanuel 'God with us' in our daily lives ~ not that I'm comparing God to a turtle, of course, heaven forbid! 'Emmanuel' means God with us, it doesn't mean 'God with us only in the good times'. Emmanuel means 'God with us - always.

If you are driving down the road when the sun is shining it's easy to see the turtles around you, but if you drive down the road when the sky is dark and it's pouring rain you are far too busy just staying on the road to see the turtles, though they are still there. It's like that with us. We all have good days and bad days. There are days when what we hear on the news gives us hope and the future looks bright, then there are the days when the news is bad and we wonder how things can be any worse.

When life is good and everything is going well we can see God in our surroundings and in many everyday events. But when our life is overshadowed by sorrow and the news is full of death and disaster it's hard to see that God is with us then. But he is - because he is Emmanuel - God with us - always.

Advent is a time to remind us once again that our God, Emmanuel, is with us - always.

