

GOD CHOOSES US ALL

Advent IV, Baptism and Confirmation

St Mark's, Hamilton Terrace

Sunday December 21st 2014

Suppose I asked you to list a few of the best known tragedies. I imagine you might well list for me a few of Shakespeare's plays – perhaps Julius Caesar or Macbeth or – most likely of all - Romeo and Juliet. Then again, you might have listed a few popular songs. Many of the most moving love songs seem to have very sad endings. However, I doubt whether many of you, when asked to think of a story that at least *begins* tragically, would have started with one of this season's favourites, a real mouldy oldie, *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer*.

But just stop for a moment and bring the lyrics to mind:

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

Had a very shiny nose

And if you ever saw it

You would even say it glows

All of the other reindeers

Used to laugh and call him names

They never let poor Rudolph

Join in any reindeer games.'

Now we all know that things got better for Rudolph later on. Doubtless the other reindeers were severely reprimanded for *nosism*, or for not recognising that poor Rudolph was *nasally challenged*. Now, slightly more seriously – and that is why I've begun with this Yuletide doggerel – the reversal of tragedy here for the rejected reindeer was the fact that he was *chosen*. Despite all the humiliating past, it is he, rather improbably who is chosen – and today, on a very much more serious level is about *choice*.

In that first reading, King David, who earlier on had been *chosen* – against all odds, from a bunch of much more likely characters to be King. But in today's lesson he's *not chosen* to build the house of God. That will fall to his son, Solomon. In the gospel reading, however, it is Mary – again a most unlikely candidate, who is chosen to be the mother of Jesus, the Incarnate One. It is through Mary that God makes himself known as a human being, as Jesus, Mary's child

Today also has been a day of choice, for Alana, Gloria, Reena and Lily have *chosen* to be baptised and confirmed, and in making this choice, God too has chosen them. So this is a great moment, a great day – and all is good so far when it comes to choice, or if you like, when it comes to being chosen. But isn't it rather more complicated than that? First of all, choice can be bedazzling, confusing. At this time of the year that's all too obvious. When we look for presents for those whom we love, there's almost too much from which to choose.

People begin to react. It's interesting that the biggest supermarkets who pride themselves with choice are suffering. It's the coming age of *Aldi* and *Lidl* – less choice, less expensive – concentrate on what really matters.

The other issue about choice is – what if you are not chosen? Rudolph was excluded, sent to Coventry – and only later accepted into the group. How did David react when he was told he would not be the Temple Builder? I suppose he had at least been chosen to be King. But, the real answer to this puzzle today is in Mary. For Mary is the prototype, the very pattern of our humanity. The key is in that final sentence: 'Then Mary said: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."' ' Mary receives God's call, she is chosen and she responds in generosity – she says *yes to God* choosing her.

That is just what Alana, Gloria, Reena and Lily are doing today. God has, in his grace chosen them, invited them and they have said yes.

But still more remarkable is it that they are doing so at just this moment – within but a few days of Christmas – of our celebration of the Nativity of Jesus. For, there is one more key thing to be said about being chosen when we put together God's grace with his choosing. For the most remarkable thing of all, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, is that God has *chosen all of us*, all humanity. In coming among us in Jesus, humanity has been blessed by God choosing us all. Alana, Gloria, Reena, Lily – all of us who have been baptised are part of one glorious chosen humanity. All we have done is to say *Yes to God*.

In a moment Gloria, Reena and Lily will be baptised as Alana already has been. As they are soaked it's a sign of drowning, dying with Jesus Christ, but then rising with Christ too. Confirmation is part of this whole journey, a sign of God's choosing us all. As I lay my hands on their heads it's a sign of God choosing all of us in the incarnation and indeed *crowning* our humanity. What a way into Christmas. Alleluia, Come Lord Jesus. Alleluia.

Amen

Readings

II Samuel 7. 1-11, 16.

Romans. 16. 25-27.

Luke. 1. 26-38.