I can remember walking along the streets of Hoi An, the seaside town in central Vietnam famed for its many tailors. As you walk along you inevitably will be approached by someone with a sandwich board with sunglasses, lighters, pens and other such items. Standing at the bus stop I was approached by one of these vendors who had noticed me squinting into the distance. I was interested in buying some sunnies because my previous pair I’d bought in Ho Chi Minh had already broken. The vendor approached me saying, “You want to buy? Very cheap, very good, genuine copy…” A “genuine copy”. Mmmm talk about an oxymoron. His “genuine Raybands” were up with the other Vietnamese “genuine copies” I’d seen, Rolmex watches, Purma runners and Chonda motor cycles (After the news I finish my reflection on ‘genuine mangers.’)

December 19th. Portarlington Carols at Port Pier Park. Commences at 7:30pm

December 21st and Christmas Eve. Singing carols

December 22nd “Christmas offering” for A2B and Bushikori

December 25th Christmas Day 9:30am-10:30am

December 27th and January 4th SU beach mission teams commence

December 29th. Outdoor service 11am in the park. Tim King will be speaking

January 26th Australia day- no outdoor service.
**SU beach mission team and meal.** How wonderful it is to have not one but two teams coming down to the Portarlington caravan park. We have a number of our people from CBTB involved. To help each team settle in, the churches of the area provide a meal. The first is on the evening of December 27th, 5:30-6pm, and the second on the afternoon of January 4th 1:00-1:30pm.

Betty Duffield is coordinating the meals for this. If you could help on:

December 27th with either:

A Casserole

A dessert

Or helping from 5:30-7:30pm by welcoming the team.

January 4th with either:

A Casserole

A dessert

Or helping from 1pm-2:30pm by welcoming the team.

Please let Betty (0458 279 160) or Richard (0409 410 668) know if you can help.

**Australia day - outdoor service changed.** We normally have an outdoor service, but we’ll be cancelling it for 2020. Last year Portarlington was so busy some people couldn’t even get there. This year, Bellarine Bayside have had a request from the Maltese community to book the BBQ’s near where we usually hold our service, which would make it more crowded again. We’ll still have the Glory tent at the market but won’t have the outdoor service.

**March 1st partners meeting.** At our AGM on December 1st we forecast that we’d require a Partners meeting, early in the new year, to vote on changes to our staff roles, changes to the finance policy and our constitution. We’ll be holding this meeting on March 1st. In February we’ll share with you information that will be pertinent to March 1st, so that you can consider and pray further in the lead up to March 1st.

**Is your manger a genuine copy (continued)?**

Reading of the birth of Jesus I was reminded of the oxymoron of Jesus’ birth (by the way an oxymoron is a figure of speech containing words that seem to contradict each other).

*There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Luke 2:8-12.*

Can you see some of the oxymorons in this short passage?

Angels, the most awe-inspiring beings, apart from God himself, announce the birth of Jesus to…shepherds on hill outside Bethlehem. This would be the modern-day equivalent of the Royals
announcing the birth of the Kate and Williams baby through the Port Report (Portarlington's local weekly A4 newsletter).

Then the “Good news” worthy of angelic annunciation is that the Saviour of the world is going to be found….in an animal feeding trough!

Then this long awaited Saviour and descendant of King David is born “to you”, shepherds, or nobodies, in fact, less than nobodies. As Charles Barkly says (not the basketball player but the bespectacled English writer), “…Shepherds were despised by the orthodox people of the day…”

Meditate on this, the creator of everything, was born, in a feeding trough for animals. And the first people to hear about it were those who were despised by the educated and elite of their day.

Talk about an oxymoron, but what does this tell us about God?

It says to me that a Bethlehem saviour in a manger “blew up” every expectation people had. It challenged peoples understanding of who God was, who God was for, who could access God and who was important to God.

So is our manger, this manger? I cant help but think that we’ve settled for a genuine copy.

• Instead of a manger that empties itself of power and prestige, our copied manger has become something nice, neat and doesn’t require any risk.
• Instead of a manger that required the messiah everything, our copied manger doesn’t cost too much.
• Instead of a manger that is vulnerable, humble and requires an absolute willingness to depend on others, our copied manger represents independence, strength and prideful self-reliance
• Instead of a manger that brings “great joy to all people”- including you, our copied manger is something to get through, endure and doesn’t make any real difference.

Swapping the real manger for a “genuine original”, is to settle for a cheap alternative. It doesn’t cost too much, it promise everything and for a short time it might make us feel like we’ve got a bargain. But in the long run it will break, fail and leave us ripped off.

Every blessing for this Christmas, but my hope for all of us is that we’ll fully live a life dedicated to the Saviour in the manger. For some of us that will mean letting go of holding people at arms distance and coming close to people - a small group perhaps or sharing your difficulties with people “in the moment”. For some of us that will require you being prepared to hang out with people you would never choose, for others of us it will require laying aside our right to be hurt and misunderstood and choose to forgive and love. As we do these things, we will embrace our Saviour who was born in a manger, announced by angels and we’ll experience the joy of the shepherds.

Dave

Pastoral Care Support
Just as a reminder, I encourage any of you who require pastoral support, or are aware of someone who needs pastoral support, to please contact Annette and Paul at pastoralcare@churchbythebay.com, or on mobile at 0490 112 289.