SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY: 22/11/26: GEOFF CHADWICK:

PENTECOST 26 (OS 34): CHRIST THE KING

"NEW YEAR'S EVE"

Today is "New Year's Eve". ie Today is the last Sunday of the liturgical year (church's calendar). Next Sunday will be the first day of the new Church's year. It may seem a bit strange that the church's New Year does not match up with the secular New Year until you realise that New Year's Day has had a chequered history:

> The earliest-known record of a New Year's festival dates from about 2000 BC in Mesopotamia, where the New Year (Akitu) commenced with the new moon nearest the spring equinox (mid-March; Babylonia) or nearest the autumn equinox (mid-September; Assyria). The year began for the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Persians with the autumn equinox (September 21) and for the Greeks, until the 5th century BC, with the winter solstice (December 21). By the Roman republican calendar the year began on March 1; after 153 BC the official date was January 1, and this was confirmed by the Julian calendar (46 BC).In the Jewish religious calendar the year begins with the first day of the month of Tishri (September 6-October 5; Rosh Hashana []). In early medieval times most of Christian Europe regarded March 25 (Annunciation Day) as the beginning of the year, though for Anglo-Saxon England New Year's Day was December 25. William the Conqueror decreed that the year start on January 1, but, later, England began its year with the rest of Christendom on March 25. January 1 was restored as New Year's Day by the Gregorian calendar (1582), immediately adopted by Roman Catholic countries. Other countries slowly followed suit: Scotland, 1660; Germany and Denmark, about 1700; England, 1752; Sweden, 1753; and Russia, 1918. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2001).

So in the midst of all this confusion over the Secular New Year, the church had long established the practice of beginning its year one month before Christmas day. (The earliest record we have of Christmas Day being celebrated is 336 AD). This month, which we call Advent became a time of looking forward to the coming of God's kingdom in various way. It was seen as a period of preparation for the feast of the Incarnation.

["The date when the season [of Advent] was first observed is uncertain. Bishop Perpetuus of Tours (461-490) established a fast before Christmas that began on November 11 (St. Martin's Day), and the Council of Tours (567) mentioned an Advent season." (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2001)]

But I jump ahead. New Year is next week – today is New Year's eve. It is an eve – evening – a time when the glorious light of one day fades away before a new dawn begins. A time between the dying of one day and the rising of a new one. A time when we celebrate what has gone before and then put it to bed. A time of looking back and looking forward.

On this day we celebrate Christ as king. We do that because as we look back through the year we see how the events of his life bring us to that conclusion. As we have moved through the year with his birth, public ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit, we climax it all with kingship. We crown his has "Lord of Lords", "Prince of Peace", "King of Kings", the "Pontentate of Time". Our looking back through the year makes us want to shout his kingship at this midnight hour. We want to break open the bubbly, we want to dance in the streets we want to keep vigil as the clock moves us from a year that was to a year that will be. For a fleeting moment we realize we have become history and we are not sure just what history we might make next year. We realize that past is past and what is to come is yet elusive.

New Year's eve it is – the old year is passing into the shadows and the New Year is yet to emerge from dawning new light.

So what's all this got to do about us?

Well it is this - we as a church are at New Year's Eve. We are entering a new era. Today, we break open the bubbly to celebrate what has gone before. We rejoice

in the achievements of the past. We wrestle with the mistakes of the past. We grieve the passing of good which will not return – friends, memories, being in the old classroom… For a fleeting moment we realize this is now history. For a fleeting moment we realize that it is now time to make history.

So let's begin to create our new Year. The old year would have been put to bed and a new year will be arising in the morning. But we do not create this new year ourselves – we are not makers of our own destiny. God's Spirit will travel with us. God's Spirit will in*form* us. God's Spirit will be a part of our contemplations. As history is replaced by a now elusive future we invite God, the Spirit of Christ the King to travel with us into our New Year.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.