



# THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

November/December 2021

## TO IMMUNISE OR NOT AGAINST COVID-19

The Queensland Government has introduced tough new measures regarding the covid vaccine. These measures can be checked out at [www.qld.gov.au](http://www.qld.gov.au) and will affect us all in different ways. Some members have already been vaccinated, others are in the process, while still others have decided not to vaccinate.

When it was first reported that Australians would begin to be vaccinated, for many, there was concern regarding the manufacture of the vaccines as some of the vaccine manufacturers were using abortion-derived cell lines in the development, production or testing of a vaccine. AstraZeneca was one of these manufacturers. According to the Charlotte Lozier<sup>1</sup> Institute's assessment, neither the Pfizer/BioNTech nor Moderna vaccines contain any substance derived from aborted human foetal cells. However, the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines did perform laboratory tests using cells derived from abortions (one from 1972 and another from 1985) to confirm the final vaccine quality (as, surprisingly, do many other commonly used medications and vaccines).

While the AELC does not have an official position on such vaccines, our church body remains firmly committed to the sanctity of life, and we continually seek to advocate for pro-life positions in the public square.

So should I take the COVID-19 vaccine if I haven't already?

This is a question only you can answer. Since Scripture has not explicitly addressed this issue, it remains a matter of Christian freedom where you must choose according to your individual conscience. Some may decide not to take the vaccine because of ongoing concerns over its relation to abortion or fear of possible health complications. Others may take it in spite of such reservations out of concern for their own health or that of their neighbour.

This now brings us to today, where we see the Queensland Government bringing in strict new measures regarding vaccination, where restrictions will be placed on people who are not vaccinated. From December 17, unvaccinated people will be unable to:

- visit vulnerable settings, including hospitals,

residential aged care, disability care accommodation, and prisons. There will be some exceptions for medical treatment, end-of-life visits, childbirth, and emergency situations

- attend hospitality venues such as hotels, pubs, clubs, taverns, bars, restaurants or cafes
- attend indoor entertainment venues such as nightclubs, live music venues, karaoke bars, concerts, theatres or cinemas
- attend outdoor entertainment activities such as sporting stadiums, theme parks or tourism experiences like reef excursions
- attend festivals – either indoor or outdoor – such as musical festivals, folk festivals or arts festivals
- attend Queensland Government-owned galleries, museums or libraries

If anyone attending a wedding is unvaccinated, the ceremony will be restricted to a maximum of 20 people.

Funerals will not be limited to only vaccinated people as funerals sometimes occur at short notice and often under difficult circumstances, making it hard to ensure all attendees are vaccinated. However, funerals will still be required to comply with occupant density limits and caps on attendees to minimise the risk of transmission.

Essential services and activities will be available to both fully vaccinated and unvaccinated people.

This means unvaccinated people will still be able to go to grocery stores, pharmacies, post offices, newsagents and clothing stores and participate in activities like going to the gym for exercise.

Capacity restrictions may still be in place at these types of businesses, and people will still need to check in to venues.

For now, there will be no restrictions placed on places of worship; however, this could change, and in Victoria, ministers of religion, by law, are to be vaccinated. It appears this same law will be passed in NSW, and the chances are that it will happen here in Queensland.

Because of these new rules, how will people react? Not everyone will care about being refused entry to pubs and clubs etc., but what about those who have elderly parents in aged care or family members in a hospital? Will the consciences of the unvaccinated allow them to keep away? Again, these are questions only as individuals you can answer.

As a called servant of Christ, I have decided to get vaccinated. Why? The Apostle Paul writes to the

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 2011, and named for Dr. Charlotte Denman Lozier (1844–1870). The goal of the Charlotte Lozier Institute is to promote deeper public understanding of the value of human life, motherhood, and fatherhood, and to identify policies and practices that will protect life and serve both women's health and family well-being. The Institute's conviction is that the insights available through the best science, sociology and psychology cannot help but demonstrate that each and every human is not only "fearfully and wonderfully made" but blessed to be born at this time in human history.

Philippians, *"Each of you should look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others!"* (2:4). Again, to the Galatians, he wrote, *"For you have been called to be free, fellow-Christians. Only do not use your freedom to give your sinful nature a starting point but through love serve one another! For the whole Law is summarised in a single saying: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself!"* (5:13-14). In order for me to carry out my calling, my conscience would not allow me to remain apart from my neighbour who is in aged care or is deathly sick and lying in a hospital, desiring the sweet Word of the Gospel to be told them. I don't want to be the one who causes restrictions to be placed on such a joyous day as when two people, male and female, come together as husband and wife in holy matrimony. As a citizen, I am opposed to the push by our government to be vaccinated and am not impressed that they have really made the decision for me, nevertheless, I must act in my neighbour's best interests.

Finally, if the government does decide to tighten the rules even further and simply makes it law that every citizen be vaccinated, then it becomes a 4<sup>th</sup> commandment issue. Whether we approve or not – and as citizens, we certainly do have the right to peaceful protest – if Scripture is silent, then we shall have to obey the government.

#### FULFILLED PROPHECIES AT THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

Millions of Christians around the world choose to celebrate the birth of Jesus during this time of year - some on December 24 or 25 and others around January 7 - while some choose not to celebrate at all. Whenever we celebrate, we can all rejoice in the fact that, by putting on humanity, the Son of God has become one of us to deal with our sin by dying in our place before conquering death when He rose from the dead.

The **Gospel of Matthew** gives us another reason to be thankful. The events associated with the birth of Jesus had fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies given centuries before the events they described. Matthew 1:22 introduces a common statement in his work. He wrote, *"All this happened to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet."* Since he used this phrasing in at least a dozen passages, Matthew knew it was important to point out to his readers that many of the events he described had fulfilled specific prophecies. Let's take a look at some of these ancient proclamations before explaining why these give us a cause to celebrate.

The first use of the fulfilment phrase mentioned above introduces one of the best-known prophecies in the Bible. *"Look! The virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and they will name Him 'Immanuel'"* (which is translated, *"God-With-Us"*) (Matthew 1:23). In reference to the birth of Jesus, Matthew cited a specific prophecy from Isaiah made

more than 700 years earlier, *"Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a miraculous sign: Look! The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a Son and will call His name 'Immanuel.'"* (Isaiah 7:14).

Just as foretold, the virgin (Mary) indeed did conceive (Matthew 1:21) and bore a Son who is called Immanuel. This amazing event demonstrates God's infinite knowledge and power. He is capable of foretelling the future with perfect precision and has the power to bring His prophecies to pass, even if that means a virgin would need to conceive and bear a Son.

After Christ's birth, the Wise Men arrived in Jerusalem. Herod gathered the chief priests and scribes and asked them where the Messiah was going to be born (Matthew 2:3). They responded by citing an Old Testament prophecy pinpointing Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Christ: *"You, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means the least among the leading towns of Judah. For from you will come a Ruler, who will shepherd My people Israel"* (Matthew 2:6; cf. Micah 5:2; John 7:42)

Herod's murderous response of slaughtering the young boys of Bethlehem led to the fulfilment of three more prophecies. First, this tragic massacre fulfilled the words of Jeremiah, *"A voice was heard in Rama, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and she refused to be comforted, because they are no more"* (Matthew 2:18; cf. Jeremiah 31:15)

The original context of this prophecy had to do with mothers in Israel lamenting the deportation of their sons to Babylon. These mothers were personified as 'Rachel,' the mother in the days of the patriarchs whose sons Joseph and Benjamin had also been threatened with being 'no more' (i.e., carried away into Egypt; cf. Gen. 42:36). Ramah was a town close to Jerusalem and associated with Rachel's tomb (1 Samuel 10:2-3).

The second fulfilled prophecy resulting from Herod's paranoiac rage took place after Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt. Upon their return, God's words to Hosea were fulfilled, *"I have called My Son out of Egypt"* (Matthew 2:15; cf. Hosea 11:1).

This prophecy was originally made as a statement of history - God had called (and brought) Israel out of Egypt. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Matthew used these words to refer to the Messiah.

The final prophecy discussed by Matthew pertaining to events in the early years of Jesus has to do with His boyhood home. God warned Joseph in a dream not to go back to Judea, so instead, he took Mary and Jesus to Nazareth in Galilee, *"that what had been said through the prophets might be fulfilled: "He will be called a Nazarene"* (Matthew 2:23). This statement has confused Christians because the Old Testament does not seem to make this

specific prediction. Sceptics have jumped on this verse, claiming that it is a contradiction in Scripture. However, there are a few plausible solutions to this dilemma.

Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Old Testament Law and was like a Nazirite who vowed to separate Himself to the Lord (Numbers 6:1–8). However, this is an unlikely explanation since no record exists of Jesus making this vow, and if He did make one, He would have broken it when He drank wine or vinegar (Matthew 26:27–29; John 19:29). Also, even though the words Nazirite and Nazareth look and sound similar in English, they are unrelated in Hebrew. Nazareth comes from the root word *netzer*, which means branch, and multiple prophets spoke of the Messiah as the “Branch” (cf. Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12).

Nazareth was looked upon with scorn. Even Nathanael asked, “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” (John 1:46). Several prophets revealed that the Messiah would be “*despised and rejected of men*” (Isaiah 53:3, cf. Psalm 22:6; Daniel 9:26; Zechariah 12:10).

Matthew may have recorded an oral tradition handed down from the prophets that was not written in the Old Testament, or perhaps it was a prophecy recorded in a non-extant, non-canonical work familiar to Matthew.

Also, notice that Matthew indicated that the “prophets” (plural) had spoken about this rather than simply indicating that one particular prophet mentioned these things. Whatever the proper solution is to this dilemma, it is clear that Matthew did not introduce a contradiction in the text.

While thinking about the circumstances surrounding Christ’s birth, we can rejoice that the Messiah has come to earth and dealt with our sin. We can praise God for fulfilling His promises, and we can have complete confidence that He will always be faithful to do what He has declared.

Despite what many believe today, the religions and religious leaders of the world are not the same. Many people in our culture promote the ridiculous claim that Jesus was just another religious leader - a good person who tried to make life better for others - but Jesus is unique in so many respects. He alone was a “good person” since He lived a sinless life. Every other religious leader has been sinful and needed a Saviour. But Jesus did not need a saviour; He is *the* Saviour.

There are no prophecies foretelling details about the birth of other religious leaders. No prophecies alerted the world to the coming of Muhammad (Islam), Joseph Smith (Mormonism), Charles Taze Russell (Jehovah’s Witnesses), Siddhartha Gautama (Buddhism), or any other founder of the world’s religions. Yet, the Old Testament pinpointed

numerous details about the life of the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

So what do these prophecies tell us about Jesus? In just the first two chapters of Matthew, we see that God foretold the virginal conception of the Messiah, who would be born in Bethlehem, yet in some way would come out of Egypt and be called a Nazarene. We also see that bitter agony would grip the mothers in that area.

In the genealogy recorded in Matthew’s first chapter, we discover the fulfilment of several other Old Testament prophecies. Jesus was from the line of Abraham (Genesis 12:3), Isaac (Genesis 26:4), Jacob (Genesis 28:14), Judah (Genesis 49:8–12), Jesse (Isaiah 11:1), and David (Isaiah 9:7). But that’s not all. A search through the rest of Scripture would reveal dozens of other details prophesied about the Messiah, including the following facts:

- He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey’s colt (Matthew 21:4–10; Zechariah 9:9).
- He would be betrayed by a friend (John 13:18; Psalm 41:9).
- The betrayal would be for 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14–16; Zechariah 11:12).
- The money would be used to purchase the potter’s field (Matthew 27:3–10; Zechariah 11:13).
- The Messiah would die a sacrificial death for us (Matthew 27:50; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Daniel 9:26; Isaiah 53:8).
- He would die with criminals, but His burial would be with the wealthy (Matthew 27:57–60; Luke 23:33; Isaiah 53:9).
- He would rise from the dead (Matthew 28:6; Psalm 16:8–11; Isaiah 53:10).
- He would say certain words on the Cross. He would be mocked, and people would gamble for His clothes (Psalm 22:1, 8, 18).

Many other prophecies could be listed that were perfectly fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ. These were not lucky guesses made by fraudulent prophets; they were precise predictions made by the all-knowing God of the Bible who repeatedly demonstrated that He has perfect knowledge of all past, present, and future events. Consequently, we can be completely confident that He will always make good on His promises and that those future events He has foretold will certainly come to pass.

About 2,000 years ago, Jesus came to earth in a humble manner. The Saviour of the world and God of all creation put on humanity to die for our sins and conquer death, giving the hope of salvation to all who turn from their sin and believe in Him. One day, He will return in judgment, and He will not appear as a seemingly helpless baby but as the risen, glorified Lord and Judge.

What will it be like for you when He returns? Will you be safe and secure because you have been saved by His amazing grace? Or will you tremble in fear before the holy and righteous God as you are condemned for rejecting His gracious offer of salvation (Revelation 20:11–15, cf. Philippians 2:9–11)?

#### FROM THE PASTOR

The past couple of months have been busy right across the parish. There has been a baptism service and confirmation service held in the parish below the range and a couple of AELC services. All this is proof (not that we needed it) that the Lord continues to bless us immensely. We have also celebrated Harvest Thanksgiving services across the congregations. We are now preparing for children's Christmas services and the Christmas season. Before we know it, these will have happened, and we shall be into the New Year. That means that we shall soon be busy with AGM's before we hit the season of Lent. I have pretty much completed the service schedule for the coming year, so expect that to be released shortly.

What a wonderful day we had at Lowood, celebrating Reformation this year. I believe this was the first time Our Saviour Lowood has hosted a combined AELC service, so it was beautiful to see it go off so well.

Again, what a wonderful day at Toowoomba on November 7, when Bethlehem congregation re-dedicated their new church. I think there were around 130-140 present, including former members of St Mary's. Before the service, some of our members gathered at Troys Road to close the building. There we thanked the Lord for His service to us over the past 26 or so years and prayed that He would continue to be with us in the new building. Thank you to those whose efforts made this a memorable day.

I would like to thank our choir and musicians who sang/played at both our Reformation Day service and also the re-dedication service. It is great to see a choir made up of members young and old from congregations across the parish.

May you all have a holy and blessed Christmas Season, and I'll see you in church, or, if you are in town, call in for a cup of tea!

Pastor

#### LATEST AELC WEBSITE STATISTICS

The following are the latest figures from the AELC website: The number of average daily visitors: currently 6810, up from 3186 in the August/September period. Our visitors have doubled! The re-dedication of the new church in Toowoomba drew 7495 visitors to the website for that Sunday. The printed service files (program and sermon) were downloaded 425 times, video of the service 196 times, and audio 101 times.

Weekly services are also available on DVD or memory stick, both video or audio, so if you want copies, please let pastor know.

Nothing left at Troys Road



Interior of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Buckland Street



Church hall set up for those who couldn't fit in the church on re-dedication day

