

## **Easter 2011 Messages from Australian Church Leaders**

***“Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.  
He has been raised; he is not here.”*** (Mark 16:6)

On Sunday 24 April Christians all over the world will remember God’s love and compassion as Easter is celebrated. Easter is the time when above all other times the church pauses to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That first Easter as light was breaking through the darkness of night, the resurrection was slowly dawning on the followers of Jesus. Today there are many dark places where people find themselves feeling isolated and alone, longing for a ray of light to pierce the darkness and new possibilities to emerge.

At Easter we rejoice that God raised Jesus from the dead. Now the light of resurrection pierces the darkness of death, revealing the newness of eternal life. Death does not have the last word, it does not define us now Christians are defined by resurrection and new life, new life in Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection of Jesus brings joy to those who mourned him and hope to Christians through the centuries that God is restoring fractured relationships and transforming fear to peace. May the great joy of Easter and the peace of God fill this nation.

*Reverend Tara Curlewis, General Secretary  
National Council of Churches in Australia*

(NB. In 2010 both Western and Eastern rite Christians will celebrate Easter on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April.)

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**Anglican Church of Australia**

Humanity lives in the shadow of death, and the start of 2011 has reminded us of this fact all too starkly. While natural disaster has hit our region of the world in floods, cyclones, landslides and earthquakes, our brothers and sisters in the Middle East have wrestled with political upheavals and civil unrest. And still famine, drought and war shape the living and dying of so many people around the globe every day.

It is into this world of darkness and death that the Christian Church proclaims the light of Christ. The Easter story is no fairy tale which papers over the stark reality of human life. Christ’s passion and death echoes our own encounters with death, with the abuse of power, with the experience of desolation and helplessness, with the sheer challenge of peace-making and justice-seeking. Christ’s resurrection speaks of God’s promise of life in abundance, which does not allow death to have the final word, and which pushes back the darkness with the flame of the gospel.

St Paul wrote that if we have shared in Christ’s death we shall also share in Christ’s resurrection (*Romans 6.5*). This Easter may we accompany Christ through death and the tomb to the promise of life in all its fullness. May we discover once again the sorrows of this world giving way to the joy that comes from life with God, who is making all things new.

*The Most Rev’d Dr Phillip Aspinall  
Primate, Anglican Church of Australia.*

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**Baptist Church**

This Easter sees a rare intersection where Easter and ANZAC Day share a public holiday. This prompts us to consider what else they share. Both are times to remember the sacrifice of others on our behalf, through selfless love and commitment. Australians have a proud tradition of honouring the diggers. We dedicate ANZAC day to remembering those who gave their lives for the cause of freedom and peace, and we honour those currently serving to defend justice and rebuild nations ravaged by war.

At Easter we remember a sacrifice that goes to the ultimate and transcends territorial disputes. We remember the life and death of Jesus Christ who was deployed by God on a mission to establish peace and hope for a world that has lost its bearings. His sacrifice of death on a cross, achieved a peace that was much deeper than the mere absence of fighting. He achieved a restored relationship with God who loves us unconditionally and believes in our future. Death was not the end of Jesus' story. In his bodily resurrection he broke the power of death and sin which had kept us disconnected from God. This Easter let us thank God for the service and sacrifice of Jesus, which has enabled us to experience ultimate freedom and peace through the forgiveness of God.

*Rev Dr John Beasy, President  
Australian Baptist Ministries*

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**Catholic Church in Australia**

Although some people may think that Good Friday is a sombre day – being a time when we reflect on the agony of the last hours of Jesus' life – the feast of Easter is predominantly a time of great joy for Christians as we celebrate the message of hope brought to us by the death and resurrection of Our Lord.

As we focus our attention on the Passion story this year, we do so in the knowledge that Pope Benedict XVI has provided us with new insights into the events of Holy Week through his book *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week – from the entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*.

The Pope's book is a great gift to us at this important time of the year because it explains in a very clear and relevant way the complex political and religious causes that led to the condemnation of Christ. Importantly, the Pope's interpretation rejects the notion that His death should be blamed on the Jewish people as a whole. This is based on the view that "the Jews" mentioned in St John's gospel as calling for Jesus to be executed does not refer to the whole population of Israel at the time, but rather refers to the Jerusalem Temple authorities.

Similarly, the Pope explains Matthew's words "His blood be on us and on our children" as words of redemption and salvation rather than a curse or vindication for anti-Semitism.

This is an important public acknowledgement and one that will do much to strengthen interfaith relations in a world dominated by fear, ignorance and extremism.

By exposing some of the previous misinterpretations of the Gospel in references to the role of the Jews, the Pope also highlights how truth is often a casualty when power is at stake, something we can all relate to when it comes to modern politics.

When you look at the way Jesus Christ challenged the status quo and advocated a different way of life it is little wonder that the authorities felt threatened and compelled to silence him.

His suffering on the way to the Cross when he was beaten and crowned with thorns only serves to demonstrate his humanness and the capacity of the powerful to crush the powerless. But in his powerlessness, Christ becomes powerful by saying his purpose in coming into the world was to "bear witness to the truth" which, as Pope Benedict writes, means "giving priority to God and to his will over and against the interests of the world and its powers".

This Easter, as a nation, we are coming to terms with the terrible natural disasters that have struck our country and our neighbours, as well as the wave of political and social unrest in the Middle East and the atrocities occurring in Ivory Coast. I hope you will join me in praying for the victims of these tragedies and offering your support in whatever way you can.

Finally, I wish all Australians a happy Easter but stress that it's a happiness that doesn't simply come from my wishes but from the truths of the faith that we celebrate: that Jesus has risen from the dead and gives us today the gifts of his life and his love.

*Archbishop Philip Wilson, President  
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*

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**Churches of Christ in Australia**

***Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb.  
They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. (Mark 16:8)***

Addictions, violence, natural disasters and the ordinary difficulties of life can become the grid through which we view our lives. They impact our moods, our work, our families and our sense of self.

We all know that the darkness of life can be overwhelming.

When hope is dashed, we view life as a burden. The Easter story, however, is about hope borne out of despair. The disciples did *not* believe that Jesus would rise from death, that light would outshine darkness, that hope would triumph. The disciples were not giddy optimists sitting by the tomb in anticipation of a resurrection.

Indeed, when informed by an angel that Jesus had risen, the response of some of the women was to flee the proof of hope, and to keep the story to themselves. Yet, two thousand years later, we know that story because hope cannot be hidden by fear.

Hope doesn't work that way. One of the themes of the Easter story is that the resurrection of Jesus gives surprising hope, a hope that emanates from unlikely places, that rises up and transforms us. Despite the oppression that the shadows of life can bring, when we read the Jesus story, we cannot escape the light and hope that Easter brings.

**He has risen. He has risen indeed.**

*Craig Brown, Federal Coordinator  
Churches of Christ in Australia*

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**Coptic Orthodox Church**

*Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions*

**The Resurrection: An Act of Christ's Love and Care**

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.” (John 15: 13)

**Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!**

An important message from this Feast is Christ's boundless love and care. The Lord Christ did not have to suffer and be ridiculed at the hands of His own creation. Yet He was willing to bear all of this injustice without complaint, to grant us victory and eternal life through His resurrection.

We see the Lord's care in how He dealt with those in deep need. The Lord went out of His way to meet the Samaritan woman in the heat of the day, to guide her with gentleness to repentance. He did not judge her for her sinful life, but praised her for telling the truth and cleansed all the dirt from her heart. This is what pleases the Lord; to do the will of the Father Who sent Him.

Our Lord had deep compassion on the paralytic man who was infirm for 38 years. He had no one to care for him and said to the Lord, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool...” (John 5:7) Though many passed by this poor soul and were not willing to extend a hand of help, the risen Lord here sets us the example of what it means to search for the souls who “have no man.” There are many that desire to know Christ's love, care and salvation and yet very few are willing to take on this work and reap the harvest for Christ. The Lord said to His disciples, “Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (John 4:35) In healing the paralytic, the Lord does not rebuke him, despite being fully aware of his sinful life, but heals him with His love and gently warns him saying, “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” (John 5:14)

We need to learn this important lesson from the risen Christ in how to deal with each other with love, compassion and without judging others. The Lord says, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12) He also says, “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” (Luke 6:37) The message of salvation and the resurrection is about a caring and loving God who wanted to redeem His people that they may not perish but live with Him eternally. If this is how our Creator deals with His sinful creation, should we not learn from Our Master and deal with our fellow humans in a spirit of love, compassion and forgiveness?

When the Lord saw the pain and suffering of Mary and Martha at the death of their brother Lazarus, He sympathised with them and “Jesus wept.” (John 11:35) Then the Lord cried out saying, “Lazarus come forth!” (John 11:43) Although Lazarus had been dead for four days, Christ reveals that He has power over death through this glorious miracle and that He is truly God.

Christ’s compassion was revealed at all times and to all, to individuals as well as to the multitudes. He persevered and taught the people many things pertaining to the Kingdom while also caring for their earthly sustenance, feeding the multitudes on several occasions.

There is much injustice in the world and we are called by the Lord to follow in His footsteps. He says to us, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:29-30) We are called to be a voice to the voiceless and the oppressed such as our brethren the Copts in Egypt. We have a duty to defend their dignity and human rights to live and worship freely without prejudice and discrimination. This must be done with Christian love and charity at all times. We have a duty towards the poor and suffering to find practical means to alleviate their pain. We have a duty to do good wherever we can and to spread the good news of the risen Christ to all creatures and nations, through our lives and examples.

We pray to the risen Christ to teach us to love and care as He did, and to be compassionate towards each other. We pray for peace and harmony amongst all people of the world.

Wishing you all a blessed and joyful Feast of the Resurrection and that this day may fill your lives with hope.

*Bishop Suriel*

*Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions*

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### **Greek Orthodox Church**

The Grace of the All-Good and Loving God has enabled us this year once again to cross over the sea of Great Lent and to reach, through the awesome Passion of Holy Week, the redeeming triumph of the Resurrection of Christ.

The Church, as an affectionate Mother, addresses the same words to all the faithful without exception: “Come receive light from the unwaning light.” Yet the illumination we each receive always depends upon the willingness with which the invitation is accepted.

When writing to the Romans, the Apostle Paul categorically underlines the direct relationship of our baptism with the death and Resurrection of the Lord:

*“we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4)*

However, when the Apostle Paul invites us to “walk in newness of life”, he is not simply prescribing for each faithful person a more devout or ‘ethical’ life after baptism. The ‘new life’ presupposes a completely radical transformation of our earlier life of ‘self-love’. With this renewal of our mind, we will put on the ‘bright robe’ of baptism. And we will go responsibly towards all our fellow human beings, proclaiming to them without exception: “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

To Christ who died and rose for all people, be glory and honour and worship to all ages.

Amen!

*Archbishop Stylianos, Primate  
Greek Orthodox Church in Australia*

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**Lutheran Church of Australia**

What God has done at Easter is much more than all the floods, cyclones, fires, earthquakes, wars and tsunamis which have hit our world so ruthlessly in the last months.

Taking our place in this world of uncertainty and conflict, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, died and was raised again to open up life from death, to give us a new start and hope in him.

*Rev'd Dr Michael P Semmler, President  
Lutheran Church of Australia.*

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**Romanian Orthodox Church**

Dear Brothers and Sister in the Lord,

*“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He is risen, as He said. Come and see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead...” (Matt. 28:5-7)*

Such were the words of the angel who stood on the stone at the tomb addressed to the women who had come to see the tomb where they have put Christ. Those words brought fear, but also gave great hope and holy joy to the women who then went to proclaim to the disciples the uncontainable news of the reality which it has been revealed to them – the Resurrection of Christ, our Lord.

It is with this great fear, but also with tremendous hope and joy that we celebrate the Feast of Feasts and we, as the disciples of Christ, are called to receive this great reality of the Risen Lord to experience it and to proclaim it to the whole universe with great joy.

We live the Resurrection of Christ, not simply as an event but rather as a continuous state of being. We are called to resurrect ourselves from the life of passions and vest into the new life of the Risen Christ. The Risen Lord offers hope for every single one of us, since “death is swallowed up in victory” (I Cor. 15:54) and when we embrace Him, the victory of the Resurrection will encompass us eternally. It is our call and duty as Christians, to take courage, to come and see the Risen Lord and encounter Him in the Church and then to proclaim Him with the example of our lives. He is risen and death has no longer power over Him and we also with Him, and in Him, will resurrect unto eternal life in His Heavenly Kingdom. Thus, “take courage” and live the joy of the Risen Lord with faith, hope and love for one another and for the whole creation.

**Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!**

With best wishes of good health and blessing from the Lord,

*Bishop Mihail  
Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Australia and New Zealand*

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**Serbian Orthodox Church**

In the light of the Resurrection, in that unapproachable light, which has shown forth from His life-giving tomb, despite all of our personal misfortunes and sorrows, our sufferings, qualms and of life's difficulties, we reveal the measureless source of our joy and the fount of eternal hope! *There is no sorrow*, states the Holy New-Confessor Barnabas of Serbia, *to which sin is not the source. Therefore, to be freed of sin is to be wed unto joy.* For Christ is risen from the dead, bestowing life upon us, and destroying unjust death, which entered through sin into the world, once and for ever, transforming it into the gift of His life!

This unbelievable news precisely requires of us a fundamental change in life, as for us a joyous heart is life! Leave behind yourselves, all of life's sorrow and all despair (Sirach 30:22-23) and enter today into the light of Christ's Resurrection! For that uncreated Divine Light, which has shown forth even from before the creation of the world, and as an inextinguishable ember buried under ashes at once bursts forth into flame, so also the light of Christ once again reveals in us the joy of life itself. *These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete* (1 John 1:4).

Within us spontaneous joy can suddenly arise from an unexpected encounter, from an enduring friendship, viewing an artistic creation or even from the very beauty of nature. Joy which is likened unto the innocence of little children; an encounter with those who suffer poverty and a multitude of misfortunes, yet those who despite everything have not remained discouraged. Precisely such and similar encounters require of us a conscientious, sober choice i.e. a determination for the unending joy of the Resurrected Lord who bestows life upon all.

The Holy Apostle Paul ceaselessly invites us to eternal joy in all circumstances (I Thess. 5:16) and in that joy that our gentleness be known before all persons (Philipp. 4:4). He reveals the source of that joy, which does not depend on that which is transient or circumstances which can drastically change from day to day, such as is clearly evident in the recent floods, earthquakes and tsunamis; rather it originates from trust in the Lord who has overcome the world (John 16:33).

Therefore, what is expected of us is to experience, each of us in our unique personal way, an authentic expression of our faith within the community of this world; a community which becomes perfected in the liturgical community of His love. However, as mere persons we are never certain as to what is authentic, for it is not given unto us to know the fullness of truth, as we are sinful and possessed of all of our human frailties. For this reason, the Risen Saviour is our only measure, the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

### **CHRIST IS RISEN!**

Your fervent intercessor before the Risen Christ,

*Bishop Irinej  
Bishop of Australia and New Zealand  
The Serbian Orthodox Church*

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**Seventh-day Adventist Church**

Many people around the world are anticipating with happy excitement the April 29 wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton. This marriage has come about because of their love for each other. Prince William is a potential king, second in line to the throne. No reasonable person would wish him anything less than a wonderful wedding day and a fulfilling married life with Catherine.

Considering this over against Easter we find a great contrast. In the Easter story we meet another king, the King of kings, but this One gave up everything for love. His love for sinful humanity meant taking our place and dying for sin. Instead of a fanfare heralding the Messiah, Jesus was confronted by an angry crowd stirred up by jealous and misdirected leaders who called for death by execution. No wedding bells for Jesus Christ, but, rather, a horrid and lonely death on a Roman cross.

Yet the story of Jesus Christ is one that will be told and retold across the globe. The grave could not hold Him. Jesus rose from the dead! And He promised to return, this second time as King. His love for every person on this planet, both small and great, has made salvation possible for all.

*Pastor K L Vogel, General Secretary  
Seventh-day Adventist Church*

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**The Salvation Army  
"Greatest love story ever told"**

My wife and I served for three years in Papua-New Guinea. In that culture, story telling plays a prominent role.

Groups of people sit under trees, beneath homes, on verandahs, sharing stories of their families, tribes and villages.

Many people in PNG do not have access to television, but even the minority who do have TV don't allow it to intrude on their practice of telling stories.

I heard some amazing stories during my time in PNG. At times, I wondered if what I was hearing could possibly be true. One story was about a bird landing on the sea off the coast near Port Moresby. When it landed on the sea, the bird turned into an island which was named Fisherman's Island.

At this time of year, we share the greatest love story ever told. It's not about a boy-girl or man-woman relationship. It's about a father and son.

In our world today, people are craving for love. They have a hunger for love. Sadly in many families, love is a missing ingredient and some are unable to find love in a relationship.

The Easter story is the greatest love story ever told about a father – in this case God – and His son Jesus Christ.

In John's gospel (chapter 13 and verse one), it is recorded: "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love."

The love of God is not just a story to be told; it is a love to be experienced and it's an extensive love that reaches to all.

John records in chapter three verse 16: "For God loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

The author of love is God – for God is love  
The object of His love – the world  
The demonstration of His love – His only Son died on the Cross  
The recipients of His love – whoever believes in Him  
The security of His love – everlasting life

This is a true story; the greatest love story ever told.

*James Condon – Commissioner, Territorial Commander  
Australia Eastern Territory*

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**Uniting Church of Australia**

For those with ears to hear the groaning of creation has become a roar: environmental degradation, inequitable access of the world's people to life's basic necessities, violence and terror – so many people have reason to echo Jesus' gut-wrenching cry from the cross: 'My God, why have you abandoned me?' This Easter, as always, Christians will inhabit the core story of the faith: empty tomb, puzzlement, fear, hope, remembrance, disbelief, amazement. Easter provides the distinctive basis for hope in the Christian faith - the faithfulness of God who not only 'bears our sorrows and is acquainted with our grief', but who works to bring life out of death and hope from despair. The vocabulary of Easter precludes denial about the depth of the world's brokenness and yet saves us from despair. It is the great 'nevertheless' that affirms that ultimately the last word in life and death belongs to a gracious God. The church is called and empowered to bear witness in its worship, in its justice-seeking, in its service, to the God who makes all things new.

*Rev Alistair Macrae, President  
Uniting Church in Australia*

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