

Friday, 26 March 2021
from the National Council of Churches in Australia

Easter 2021 Messages from Australian Church Leaders

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) is a group of Australian Christian Churches, gathered from across this wide brown land, who have embarked on a pilgrimage together. We each bring a widely varied history of place, experience, and theology, but we share a common faith and confession in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. We also share a common future as we are convinced that the future of Christians in Australia lies together, not in separation.

Messages from our churches speak to our Australian and world context in this year's Easter Sunday celebration of Jesus Christ's resurrection or rising from the dead after being crucified or put to death on the day called Good Friday.

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17 NIV)

This year, the Western Churches will celebrate Easter on Sunday 4 April and the Orthodox Churches will celebrate Easter on Sunday 2 May. Easter marks the foundation of Christianity.

*Liz Stone, General Secretary
National Council of Churches in Australia*

For more information, contact the **NCCA Secretariat on 8259 0800** or secretariat@ncca.org.au

The 14 messages follow.

Anglican Church of Australia

The Light Shines in the Darkness

John in the opening of his Gospel proclaims that in ***Jesus “was life, and the life was the light of all people”*** (John 1:4). This light shines most brightly in the love that Jesus shows as he lays down his life for the good of all people and the whole of creation.

The account of Good Friday tells us of a darkness coming over the land as Jesus hung on the cross. It appeared that darkness had extinguished the light. But, Easter Day is the declaration that the Light of the World has not and cannot be put out. For ***“the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it*** (John 1:5).

The resurrection of Jesus celebrated at Easter is a declaration of the transforming power of Christ overcoming darkness and bringing hope.

We continue to see much darkness over the world. We have travelled through the darkness of Covid-19. We have seen the darkness of racism and the darkness of domestic violence and the darkness of gender inequality and the abuse of women. Thankfully, light has begun to shine on these and other areas. There has been the light of vaccine development, the light of people speaking out, the light of public awareness. Yet, more light is required.

As Christians who are being transformed by the light of Christ and empowered by his resurrection, we too are called to be lights into this darkness. We are called to share in the mission of the risen Jesus. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the reason we know that there is an answer to the darkness and brokenness of this world. There is hope and salvation. There is a light that cannot be overcome.

May you this Easter know the transforming power of the Risen Jesus, be filled with his light and so be a light to others to the glory of God our Father.

With Easter blessings,

*The Most Reverend Geoffrey Smith, Primate
Anglican Church of Australia*

Diocese of the Antiochian Orthodox Church of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines

Christ is risen. Indeed, He is risen.

We are celebrating blessed days that move us to the next chapter of our life, the Resurrection.

The world is facing tough time through sicknesses, death, and disasters. It is the cycle of life. And the Cross appears like an instrument of struggling, but in reality, it was, and it will always be, the Bridge to eternal Life. Christ is risen, granting us His divine Grace and the eternal Life.

Approaching Him will make us feel the safety; because He is the only One Who loves us unconditionally.

May the resurrected Lord grant you all, with your beloved ones a joyful life filled with the Gifts of Him, Who is risen from the dead.

Yours in Christ,

Archbishop Metropolitan Basilios

His Eminence Metropolitan Basilios, Archbishop

Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines

Assyrian Church of the East

As we celebrate Easter, God has a message for us here. The crucifixion of Christ and His resurrection is living proof of the love, goodness, mercy, care, and concern of our Creator. It is a living proof of the resurrection of Christ and our own resurrection. And this living proof is greater than our doubt. It is time, now more than ever, that we be witness to our faith. We need to come together, in these difficult and troubled times of our age, to seek ways to get through the pains and uncertainties of our lives to the time of resurrection and new life. To celebrate our victory through Christ the Lord. What we desperately need now more than anything else is a reason to hope and be certain that God Has not forsaken us. We need to be able to choose life rather than death. Jesus Christ gives us that ability to choose life, as he brings hope to each and every human being. Joining St Paul in his message of hope; ***“Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ”*** (Philippians 2:13-14). Therefore, we need not let the shattering of dreams, or even the onset of age and trials we face, to leave us in hopelessness. For although we know that this life is on the whole very good indeed, we realize it is only a foretaste for the life to come, because through Christ and His promise, our hope is founded in the gift of eternal life which we received in His resurrection.

Archbishop Mar Meelis Zaia AM

Assyrian Church of the East, Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon

Catholic Church in Australia

EASTER 2021

In a recent address to the American people, President Biden quoted a famous line from Ernest Hemingway's novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, set during World War I and published in 1929: "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places". These may seem bleak words, but they take us to the heart of Easter.

They take us first to the dark mountain of Calvary which stands as witness to the truth that "the world breaks everyone". Calvary is the home of all brokenness. The violence of sin broke Jesus on the Cross, and the violence continues to this day: Calvary is forever. The pandemic has broken us all in one way or another, a masterstroke of the sin, which is not personal but supra-personal, even cosmic.

Yet Easter does not leave either Jesus or us broken on the dark mountain. It takes us, strangely, into the morning light of the Resurrection, revealing the truth that "afterward many are strong at the broken places". Jesus rises into a strength which is invincible. The Lamb once slain now lives forever: they can't do any more to him. The violence of sin did its utmost on Calvary, but it is powerless now before the Risen One whose scars shine like the sun that drives away all darkness.

Easter is the promise of the same invincible strength to us in our brokenness – the brokenness of our life, of our family, of our Church, of our nation, of the world. All of that we bring to this Easter, trusting that the Risen One will make us "strong at the broken places". His power and our trust can turn all our sorrow to joy, all our fear to love, all our anxiety to calm, all our hostility to fraternity. The world does break everyone, leaves them in pieces; but in Jesus the God of Easter gathers up the pieces and gloriously unites all things in heaven and on earth (cf Ephesians 1:10). "Peace be with you".

*Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane,
President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*

Chinese Methodist Church in Australia

The resurrection of Jesus bring hope to us.

Easter is a joyful and blissful celebration as the resurrection of Jesus brings hope to us.

For Christians, the resurrection of Jesus cannot be a story made up by a group of discouraged disciples. It is the truth about the eternal plan of God who wants to save mankind from sins as predicted in the Old Testament and Jesus himself. Moreover, the resurrected Jesus not only changed the lives of Paul, Peter, other apostles, but also the lives of countless believers in two thousand years of church history.

1 Corinthians 15: 19-20 says, ***"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."***

Paul reminds us that we should not only to have hope for this life. There is nothing wrong for us to have hope for this life on earth. We can work hard to pursue better academic performance, higher performance in the workplace, more money in our savings etc. However, our days in this world are passing by very quickly, what will be left when we are gone? We should focus on eternity; we need the resurrected Jesus who became ***“the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”***

Dear friends, because of Jesus’ resurrection, we have hope in Him, the hope of resurrection. We do not know what tomorrow is going to be like, but we know that God can lead us through the storm in our lives. The risen Lord promises to be with us always, and He loves us forever.

Bishop Albert Wong
Chinese Methodist Church in Australia

Churches of Christ

Jesus’ death is perhaps the ultimate example of love. Jesus Himself said that greater love has no one than to lay down his life for his friends.

But was this love contrasted by an unloving act, God allowing His Son to die a cruel death on a Roman cross? No. Good Friday brought us Good News in which perfect love balanced perfect justice.

Living independently of God renders our smallest wrongdoings and shortcomings punishable by death, not because we are evil, but because a perfect judge must judge perfectly. A perfect Heaven, then, would require we be perfect to access it.

God’s perfect love, though, offered us an escape. Jesus, who was God and therefore had no sin of His own, was able to pay for ours. Being also fully human, He became a like-for-like substitute for the death we deserved.

On that first Easter Sunday He broke sin’s hold in rising again. It would therefore have no ultimate power over anyone accepting Him as their own substitute.

This Good News of Jesus’ sacrifice for us therefore becomes a priceless gift to any of us who are willing to receive and open it. Our price is allegiance to the one who gives life back to us, rather than taking it away.

May that life be lived with honour and gratitude to make an enduring difference through Him, with Him, and for Him as both Saviour and Lord this Easter and beyond.

Dr. Rob Nyhuis – National Chair,
Churches of Christ Council in Australia

Coptic Orthodox Church – Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions

Christ is Risen, Truly He is Risen!!

As we celebrate the glorious Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, we rejoice, and our hearts are full of gladness.

The Resurrection of Christ is victory over death because **"by death He trampled death and upon those in the tombs He bestowed eternal life"**.

Moreover, the Resurrection of Christ is victory over sin because Christ suffered, died on the Cross and rose from the dead in order to **"put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26)**.

Furthermore, Christ's Resurrection is victory over enmity. It reconciled man to God because **"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19)**.

Christ's glorious Resurrection and its illuminating light gives us hope that no matter how long darkness remains, the light will eventually shine.

This Easter we pray for our Australian society and the entire world still struggling with COVID 19. We pray for those still recovering from the drought and bushfires and those impacted by the recent floods.

Through the power of His glorious Resurrection, may our loving Christ strengthen us to see Him during these difficult times.

Then we can rejoice as we see His mighty hand. Transferring grief and sorrow to joy; sickness and illness to healing; death to life.

May the light of the risen Christ fill your families and homes with abundant spiritual strength and joy. Christ bless Australia, its Government, and its people.

Bishop Daniel

Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church - Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions

Greek Orthodox Church of Australia

"now all things are filled with light, heaven and earth and all things beneath the earth."

Χριστός Ανέστη. Αληθώς Ανέστη! **"Christ is Risen; Truly He is Risen"**

On this day, the Christian Church proclaims her steadfast faith -as She has done throughout history- that the power of death has been utterly destroyed; and that the gift of life, in all its fulness, now reigns victorious. Indeed, this joyous and life-giving message of Pascha, the Feast of all Feasts as it is known, is one extended not only to all Christian faithful around the world, but more broadly, the entire world. All are invited to enjoy the bright festival; all are invited, as a

matter of fact, to come and receive the gift of life so generously bestowed by Christ on Easter morning.

More importantly, this gift of life, opened up before us by our Risen Lord, is not life as we customarily know it in its biological dimensions. Rather, it is one which sets us free from the fear of death; a life which far exceeds our time here on earth; one which promises to extend beyond the grave; namely, a life beyond death. Today, our Saviour destroys the sting of death, by enduring death, and, in so doing, becomes, through his resurrection, as St Paul tells us "the first-fruits of all those who have died " (1 Cor 15:20). In this way, our Risen Lord brings heaven and earth into communion; we behold before us an intimate and lasting unity between two radically different realities: namely, the created world and our uncreated God.

Today, the gates of Paradise open up before us and the light of Heaven permeates the entire universe, sanctifying all that comes into its path. It is for this reason that the Church, in one of her hymns on Easter night, proclaims, "now all things are filled with light, heaven and earth and all things beneath the earth." The light is none other than the presence of the resurrected Christ amongst us, Christ "***the true light which enlightens everyone***" (Jn 1:9), namely, the unfading joy of our eternity. And so, beyond the ongoing difficulties and challenges, let us, more than ever, embrace this unfading light of Christ, with all our hearts and with all our being; let us rejoice in the Light of the Resurrection and share the radiant Paschal joy to all those around us through our witness; knowing that His is a Light which will radically transform our fragile existence, raising us up into life everlasting.

Wishing you all a blessed and joyous Easter, I remain,

Prayerfully yours

*Archbishop M A K A R I O S, Primate,
Greek Orthodox Church of Australia*

Lutheran Church of Australia

According to the economic law of diminishing returns, beyond a certain point the more you put into something the less reward you will get in terms of output. The reward eventually becomes so small you need to stop.

This rule works across the range of life issues. Eating good food, for example, is pleasurable and satisfying. Eat too much, though, and you will spend the next day regretting it. The same for alcohol, and consumer spending. We crave the next purchase, the thing we have to have, but it doesn't quite deliver on its promise.

Living well means knowing when to stop. In our consumption-based society, it's hard to apply the brakes. We are driven by ever increasing consumption. Advertisers tempt us to go beyond what we actually need or can afford. Similarly, with social media – we can get in too deep before we realise it. We begin for pleasure of it, but it can become an exercise in being harmed and in harming others.

This is not a new thing in the world. During the trial of Jesus people just didn't know when to stop. They knew he was innocent, but the pile on just happened anyway. Nothing could stop it,

and God chose not to do so. He let his Son suffer this way and even die. This story of voluntary self-giving for the love of others is at the heart of the Christian gospel.

These days many people say this story of love is a worthless delusion, believing they know better. It's derided as at best irrelevant, or at worst a negative influence on human freedom. Yet the story has survived much worse abuse than that. It reveals so much about who we think we are, who we really are, and what true goodness really is. Christians don't think this is a worthless story – we believe it's the wisdom of God.

Whatever you think of the church, and all the bad press it gets today, I urge you to look beyond that to this story of God's personal love. We who believe in Jesus, and gather around him in hope, are no different to you. We aren't perfect, and don't pretend to be. We live in the world just like everyone else, with the same fears and hang-ups.

But good news in which we believe exceeds those limitations. It's not held back by any law of diminishing returns. Jesus' life, death and return to life, is the unlimited gospel of God's love. Not even death defeats, and certainly not the small deaths of our fears and failures. This Easter message might look weak or even foolish, but it is stronger and wiser and more enduring than anything else we can know or experience. We want the world to know how wonderful and liberating it is.

Bishop John Henderson
Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Easter reminds me that many millions of Christians have followed Christ's example and willingly, even cheerfully faced persecution and death.

Fortunately, this is a situation we are unlikely to confront. However, March 9th, 2021 Day of Action Sacred People, Sacred Earth called our political leaders and each of us to choose between denying and affirming Life as we confront both climate change and species extinction. The small and large choices we make each day matter. The question put three times to Peter: "Do you love me?" remains a question for each of us.

When I make wrong choices, I live to regret those decisions. When I choose life giving and life sustaining actions as companion, protector and guide; when I choose love over hate, forgiveness over judgement, give of myself and share my gifts--I experience an inner assurance recorded also in the Easter stories, by mystics and others across the ages.

May this same Easter presence enter and moment by moment inspire and guide us.

What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments,
but what is woven into the hearts of others.
Pericles (455-399 BCE)

Ann Zubrick, Presiding Clerk
Religious Society of Friends in Australia (Quakers)

The Salvation Army, Australia

Light through the darkness

When looking at our world today, the darkness can be overwhelming. Bad news fills our newspapers and social media feeds. Heartbreak – whether for ourselves personally or experienced by others – seems to be around every corner. It can feel as though there is no light at the end of the tunnel or no hope for a brighter tomorrow.

Throughout Jesus' life on Earth, he experienced dark days – the darkest of all were those leading up to his death on the cross. Jesus experienced fear and anxiety about the task he knew was before him – ***“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow”*** (Matthew 26:38). His closest friends betrayed and rejected him. He was hurt and ridiculed. His loved ones watched him die. They would have felt heartache, despair, sadness and grief.

Thankfully, Jesus' death is not the end of the story. He overcame death itself in a message of hope that we too can overcome our darkness. This message of hope is the reason for our celebration on Easter Sunday.

There is always an opportunity for light and hope to enter your darkness. Just as a small candle can brighten up even the darkest of rooms, the light of Jesus can shine brightly into all of life's dark places. And the good news is that Jesus' light is brighter than anything else. *“I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in darkness. They will have that light. They will have life”* (John 8:12, NIRV).

From The Salvation Army to you, we wish you an Easter filled with hope.

*Commissioners Janine and Robert Donaldson,
The Salvation Army, Australia*

Uniting Church in Australia

In the Easter Story, we hear a story of hope and the possibility of transformation for our times.

In one of the accounts of Easter Sunday, two women, friends of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, came to the tomb of Jesus.

These women had responded to the love and hope that Jesus embodied in his life and ministry.

It would have taken courage and deep love to come to that place to honour Jesus after his death, associating with one who had been put to death by the political authorities. The other disciples were in hiding because they feared for their lives.

The women did not find Jesus dead. Instead, they learnt the life-transforming news that Christ had risen. An angel commissioned them to share the news with Jesus' disciples.

The women left that place and shared the good news with great joy.

The witness of these courageous witness has echoed down through the centuries. We have the good news today because of their testimony.

When Jesus died, it seemed the powers that were challenged by his life and message had overcome him, destroying the hopes of so many. And yet they did not have the last word. Jesus' message of justice, love, reconciliation, and hope is raised in his risen presence.

I give thanks today for those courageous women: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.

And I give thanks for the women and men who are courageously sharing the good news of Jesus today: telling of resurrection life and transforming hope, advocating in the face of injustice, seeking justice for First Peoples, raising voices for gender equality, calling out for the healing of our planet. The risen presence of Christ inspires and empowers Christians today. We too are called to share and to embody the good news – that God's vision of love, peace, justice, and reconciliation is alive.

May God bless you with courage and hope this Easter – Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed. Alleluia.

*Dr Deidre Palmer, President
Uniting Church in Australia*

Australian Baptist Ministries

Power through powerlessness

At first glance, The Cross of Jesus stands as a picture of powerlessness. The man who hangs on the cross is dying in shame, condemned by the authorities that exact maximum punishment for crimes against the state. But this is the same man who has fed the hungry, healed the sick and yes, even raised the dead. How could it have all gone so wrong?

Yet take another, longer look at Jesus on the Cross and you will also see a very powerful victory. Jesus was innocent of the crimes he was executed for. In fact, he was innocent full stop. Being nailed to a cross outside Jerusalem was not a mistake ... it was the plan. God's plan to pay the price and make a way for you and me to have a personal relationship with God. Forever.

And so, we see the power in the seemingly powerless circumstances of a truly innocent man — innocent of everything — being executed on my behalf and your behalf.

God has done the work. He has made the way. The gift of eternal relationship with God is being offered with outstretched arms. The choice is yours.

You do not have to earn it ... it is not for sale. You do not have to get prepared ... he wants to meet you just as you are. There is nothing between you and God except your willingness to accept His gift.

But all this could not have happened if Jesus — the truly innocent man — did not die on a cross and then rise to life again three days later.

That is why we celebrate Easter.

*Rev Mark Wilson, National Ministries Director
Australian Baptist Ministries*

Australian Christian Churches

The past year has been a tough and challenging time for everyone. We have all been looking for rays of new hope. It could be news of borders reopening to see loved ones again, a financial boost for a struggling business, or medical breakthroughs that can combat the virus. All of these could be good news that gives us some hope in helpless situations.

The greatest news of hope for humanity came that Easter Sunday morning 2,000 years ago – the Resurrection of Jesus was news that gives us all the assurance of hope for the future.

That first Good Friday, few understood the implication that Christ's painful death on the cross would actually mean life; and that Saturday, there was little to look forward to in the midst of the total silence and confusion. Then Sunday came with the news of Resurrection life, bringing hope and faith for the future.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead. He is not here – He is risen” (Luke 24:5-6).

This Good News is for us today, no matter what we are facing. Instead of feeling vulnerable and downcast, let's look up and see the Resurrected Saviour of the world.

My prayer is that this Easter will be a time when we pause, reflect and embrace the hope of the Resurrection of Jesus. This will not only see us through the year ahead, but every day of our lives.

*Pastor Wayne Alcorn, National President
Australian Christian Churches –Released 19 March 2021*

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