

2022 Christmas Messages from Leaders of Christian Churches in Australia

The John Lennon song 'So this is Christmas' asks a question 'and what have you done'? It connects the celebration of Christmas with our action and activity and in the lyrics leads us into the reality of the experiences of peoples. It makes the case that Christmas is about change.

In the birth of Jesus, God is at work. God expresses a depth of grace and love in the vulnerability of a displaced family and their newborn baby placed in a borrowed animal feeding trough.

The birth of Jesus in a time of political oppression and control is not about invincibility, control and victory – it is about openness, solidarity and risk. God is incarnate in Jesus and is present in the helplessness of a baby.

There are connections between the realities of today and 2000 years ago. Racial and political oppression continue. Many are vulnerable to displacement resulting from war, climate change and disaster. People are abused and discriminated against. First Peoples around the world struggle for recognition and justice, and in Australia the intent of the Statement from the Heart is politicised.

What can we say at Christmas? What is to be done? We can be clear and celebrate that love, justice and compassion have the last word. Further we can act in ways that express such goodness so that new life and hope grow.

May the grace and beauty of Christmas create hope in us and guide our actions.

*Rev John Gilmore, President
National Council of Churches in Australia*

(NB. In the Western Church, Christmas is celebrated on Sunday 25 December 2022.
Most Orthodox Churches will celebrate the Feast of the Nativity on Thursday 7 January 2023.)

14 messages follow.

For more information, contact the NCCA Secretariat on 02 9299 2215.

Anglican Church of Australia

One of the key themes at Christmas is love. The love of God for the whole creation is the motivation for Jesus becoming one of us. In Christmas celebrations this love is extended to family and friends. While the motivation behind Jesus' birth is clearly God's love for the world, the goal of Christmas, the meaning of Christmas is more than the motivation. The birth of Jesus is the beginning of a process for God to be recognised as king of all.

In the person Jesus we see God as a human. In the ministry of Jesus, we see God acting as enacting his kingdom - the will of God being done on earth as it is in heaven. We see the future new creation being brought into the present and are invited to embrace this future and live it in the present.

Christmas is an intensely political event. Christmas challenges the political order because Jesus threatens the accepted powers. If God is king, then no one else can be. If God's kingdom is being inaugurated in Jesus, then the other kingdoms and powers of the world must be diminishing. God's kingdom was visible in the life and ministry of Jesus, so no wonder Herod tried to kill Jesus. He clearly understood the threat a rival king was.

So, Christmas, while very important is not an end in itself, nor is it the end. Christmas is the beginning of a wonderful project which will see God recognised as king and God's kingdom come. God's kingdom when it comes to fruition will be marked by peace, justice, wholeness, healing, reconciliation and will include a new creation of the whole creation.

At the moment, many people in our community do not recognise God as king and our world certainly reflects anything but peace, justice, wholeness, healing, and reconciliation. Our world and its people are groaning and experiencing dis-ease.

Christmas is a feast of hope because in the birth of the Christ child we see that God has a plan for the future of the world which in Jesus is beginning to become reality. Christmas also has an 'edgy' feel because it looks forward to the de-throning of the powers and systems behind war and suffering, discrimination and injustice, poverty and abuse. This makes Christmas much less benign than it is often portrayed, and challenges us who benefit from systems and circumstances which see such incredibly unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity across the world.

Christmas is to be celebrated. The project it unveils is to be anticipated. As we grasp its significance, we do what we can to see God's 'will be done on earth as it is in heaven'.

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

Assyrian Church of the East

It is that time of year again where the Christian world comes together to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is during this time that we ascribe praise and worship to the King Jesus born in Bethlehem. In doing so, we are in line with the wise men and shepherds who came together in the manger and knelt before the Baby King. But not only the wise men and shepherds, but creation itself came together to ascribe praise and worship. For we saw the bright star in the sky which led the wise men shift from its original place and drew near to Christ our Lord, hence why its brightness was magnified in the heavens. The star drew near to kneel and worship its Creator, the Lord Incarnate. And in doing so, it's light shone brighter than ever.

During this Christmas season, let us shift from our original place of sin, convenience, and complacency, and draw near to worship the King of Kings. In doing so, our light too will shine brighter than ever. It is here we recall the words of Christ in Matthew 5:16 ***"let your light shine before men"***.

Wishing you all a blessed Feast of the Nativity.

In Christ,

Rev'd Fr Ramen Youkhanis

Secretary to the Archbishop Mar Meelis Zaia AM, Metropolitan

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

Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand

Joy to the world the Lord is born

At the birth of Jesus, some two thousand years ago, joy and peace were heralded by the angels and witnessed by the Magi of the East and the shepherds. Those who embraced this peace and joy transmitted it from one generation to the other to us today. Today, in the 21st century humanity is as further from that peace and inner joy as in the first century.

The Covid pandemic jolted the whole world, it underlined the limitations of mankind. Covid's effect on all aspects of our society cannot be minimised. Its reverberations are still evident. The pandemic further exposed the gap between the rich and the poor, between those who have and those who have not. The war in Ukraine was instigated through greed, intolerance, and domination. The destruction and human suffering are beyond description. This war's consequences felt all over the world, with shortages of wheat, oil, gas, and all kind of raw materials.

The Christians in the Middle East and the Armenians with them are suffering because of wars and conflicts between various groups and powers. Moreover, in Armenia people experience the aftermath of the disastrous war of 2020 with Azerbaijan. Thousands of people perished and were wounded, tens of thousands are refugees; Azerbaijan continues scorch earth policy eliminating Armenians from Artsakh-Karabagh and border regions within Armenia. We thank the NCCA and other Christian organisations that stand in solidarity with the suffering of the Armenian people, to raise their voice for peace, justice, and harmony among nations.

"For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." (John 4:20)

The absence of Jesus in our society is the reason for all this evil. How can there be peace in the world if there is no peace in the heart of the individual. **“Peace, I leave with you; not as the world gives do I give to you.”** (John 15: 28) A peace which transcends this world and earthly worries where one is in harmony with his inner self with God, with people and the world at large, a peace and tranquillity where one is unified with the beauty and the silence of the universe. If one does not love his own, how is he going to love others; **“Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.”** (John 16: 13) If one does not care for the poor and the sick, how is he going to care for the animals and heal the wounded world?

Archbishop Haigazoun Najarian, Primate

Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand

Catholic Church in Australia

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace

Hail, the Son of Righteousness

These words from a popular Christmas Carol, so familiar to us, capture both the hope and the challenge of Christmas, especially this year as we watch with horror as the war in Ukraine wreaks such devastation and inflicts so much suffering. As people of faith, we continue to hope and pray for peace in Ukraine, and in so many other parts of our world, which are engulfed by violence and conflict at this time.

We also recognise, again as people of faith, that to hope for peace and to pray for peace is not enough. We must also work for peace. We are, after all, disciples of the one who said, **“How blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”** (Matt 5:9).

We may well feel powerless to do anything to bring peace to Ukraine or to other places where conflict rages. It is understandable to feel this way but it is not quite true. We can and must pray continually asking the Lord to replace hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. We can certainly contribute through our generosity to those who are working to relieve the suffering of so many people around the world. But we can also recognise that in the mystery of human solidarity the darkness which has taken hold of those who wage war can also take hold of our hearts. We can, and often do, inflict violence on those around us: the violence of rejection; the violence of unforgiveness; the violence of coercion and domination; the violence of blindness and insensitivity to those in need. The call to be a peacemaker is really an invitation to each of us to reflect on the quality of our relationships with those closest to us, both emotionally and physically.

This Christmas, as we do, indeed, “hail, the heaven born Prince of Peace” perhaps the best gift we can give in recognition of God’s self-gift to us in Jesus is the gift of forgiveness, the gift of compassion, the generous gift of our best self to those we love and all those we meet. May we all have a happy and holy Christmas, and bring that happiness and holiness to others.

*The Most Reverend Timothy Costelloe SDB, Archbishop of Perth and
President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*

Chinese Methodist Church in Australia

Finding the Incarnate Lord Jesus

On the night of the birth of the Infant, the first group to look for Jesus were shepherds. An angel reported the good news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds at night, saying; ***"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 Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*** The shepherds, astonished and excited, hurried off to Bethlehem and found the holy Baby lying in a manger, just as the angel said. So the message of great joy regarding the birth of Jesus as Savior spread. (Luke 2:10-17).

After the Lord Jesus was born, the second group to search for Jesus were several magi from the East. They saw a bright star in the east, traveled long distances, experienced great hardships and came to Bethlehem to worship Him with gifts. They looked for the Lord Jesus with ***"great joy"*** in order to come and worship Him, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, for they knew that it is Jesus Christ the King who was born. (Matthew 2:1-12).

What should Christmas really be a celebration of? We celebrate Christmas because we know the Lord Jesus as our Savior and King of our lives. Christmas is a day to celebrate and worship the Lord Jesus. Friend, may you find the Lord Jesus in your life.

Rev Milton PK Nee, Bishop

Chinese Methodist Church in Australia

Churches of Christ in Australia

Jesus was born to bring freedom

In the 1998 film, *The Truman Show*, Jim Carrey plays an actor trapped in a movie set of his life, unaware that every scene has been staged from his birth.

His need for freedom is like ours, where we become caught up in a giant set of the movie of a life we did not plan, one we cannot fully comprehend. It traps us in a deception tied to the self-absorption so prevalent in our culture. This keeps us bound and unavoidably incapable of finding and pursuing genuine release without the Christmas gift of God's intervention.

Of course, we reflect in limited measure the attributes of our Creator, being capable of the love, grace and compassion so evident around us at Christmas. These are, however, traits which are inevitably displayed imperfectly. We remain ultimately incapable of true freedom without the transforming power of God entering our world 2000 years ago.

The coming of Jesus was as sinless deity. He was therefore capable of dying for our wrongdoings and shortcomings. He also became human to qualify as a like-for-like substitute. Therefore, it is only by accepting his conquest of death three days after his crucifixion that any of us could ultimately enjoy the provision of abundant life that he offers through the events of Christmas.

This life is a gift, freely given and undeserved, and God is its matchless giver.

Only when we choose to accept it for ourselves and to live in its power can we truly find freedom and a relationship with God eternal.

May you and your family be richly blessed this Christmas as you revel in that gift and the freedom that it continues to provide.

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

Coptic Orthodox Church Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions

Message for the Feast of the Nativity 2022

It is with great joy that I wish you a blessed Feast of the Nativity of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ as well as a blessed New Year. May our Lord give us the blessings of the Holy Nativity and grant us a joyful holy blessed New Year.

Our celebration of the Feast of the Nativity is the celebration of the mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the mystery of Divine Humility in which Christ made Himself of no reputation for our salvation. In his epistle to the Philippians, St. Paul says, **"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).**

Our true celebration of the mystery of the Incarnation which is the mystery of Christ emptying Himself lies in how we learn to empty ourselves and imitate our good Lord in serving others.

We ought to understand that true greatness is revealed in the service with sacrifice and self-denial. We must extend ourselves to the weak and vulnerable, the underprivileged and the broken. Indeed, the Son of Man came to serve not be served.

May our Lord, born in Bethlehem, Saviour of the world, bless and protect our beloved Australia, its people and Government.

*His Grace Bishop Daniel
Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church -Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions*

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

“Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε! Christ is born; glorify Him!”

A hymn chanted in the Orthodox Church during the matins service for the Great Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ exclaims:

Man was made in the image of God. Because of his transgression he tumbled down and was to corruption wholly bound, falling from a divine, superior life. Now the wise Creator once again refashions him, for He has been glorified.

(Troparion, Canon 1 of the Feast of the Nativity)

This refashioning of the human person constitutes the very core and essence of the purpose of the mystery of the incarnation. The pre-eternal Word and Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, out of His absolute love, as true and perfect God becomes true and perfect Man, to recreate and renew the human person, to raise them up to new and true life. This new and true life that is **"hidden in Christ"** (Col. 3:3) has its source and fulfilment in the very life of God, and it begins here and now, and is completed and perfected eschatologically in the Heavenly Kingdom.

Moved by a spirit of absolute rationalism and scientific certainty, our increasingly secularised and religiously indifferent modern world seeks to re-establish ideals and values somewhat contrary to the life-giving divine commandments. Although the notions of love, freedom, and human integrity, among others, predominate, they are separated from their source who is God Himself. All these inherently human ideals are real and genuine and can guide the human person towards the pursuit for objective truth, personal happiness and prosperity, and the meaning of life. Yet, separated from God, they are partial and incomplete.

With Christ, who is the source and giver of life and the fullness of love, who bestows His abundant heavenly blessings, all things become spiritually and existentially complete. Christ exclaimed: **"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"** (John 10:10). The human person is thus transfigured in their entirety - mind, heart, soul and body - in accordance **"to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"** (Eph. 4:13), by His over-flowing divine grace. This divine grace which is **"the participation of the divine nature"** (2 Peter 1:4) refashions the human person, makes them truly and fully human. This divine grace bestowed on every human person in and through the mystery of the incarnation of our Lord and God Jesus Christ becomes a reality for all of us to experience and participate here and now, in truth, faith and love. For this reason, the Church today, with abounding joy and rejoicing, proclaims:

Christ is born; glorify Him! Christ comes from heaven; go and meet Him. Christ is on earth; arise to Him. Sing to the Lord, all you who dwell on the earth; and sing praises in gladness, O you peoples, for He has been glorified.

(Katavasia, Canon 1 of the Feast of the Nativity)

Let us open our hearts and minds so we may be embraced by Christ our God, **"the Sun of Righteousness"** [τὸν ἥλιον τῆς δικαιοσύνης], who has caused "the light of knowledge to rise upon the world." Wishing all a blessed and joyous Christmas, I remain,

Archbishop Makarios, Primate

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand

If you look carefully at the hands of the baby Jesus in a nativity scene, you can learn something wonderful about the very heart of story of Christmas. If the nativity scene has been made in the traditional way, then the hands of baby Jesus will be outstretched, directed upwards, with palms open towards you. In this image, God is saying, *"I love you. I reach out to you and I want to bless you."*

Because we know this heart of God for us, shown in the manger of Jesus, we confidently ask God to take our hand and to lead us, knowing that God will hold fast to us and will guide us along a good path.

When the angel first spoke to those shepherds watching their flocks by night at Bethlehem, he gave us good words for the message of the manger. The angel said, ***"I bring you Good news of great joy for all the people, for to us a Saviour is born, who is Christ the Lord."***

On behalf of the people of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand, I wish you and your loved ones a beautiful and blessed hope-filled Christmas time.

Reverend Paul Smith, Bishop
Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand

Religious Society of Friends in Australia (Quakers)

For me Christmas is a time of peace and joy, reflected in the faces and actions of countless people, only some of whom are "Christian". I especially love the religious music of Christmas, for instance the carols.

However, the over-commercialisation of the festival puts me and many others off and it's a very difficult time for families struggling to make ends meet. There is an expectation of generosity which may be ill-afforded.

So, as well as a family time of celebration, Christmas is an opportunity to hold in the Light people all over the world who are doing it hard, and offer whatever we can to relieve suffering.

Christmas is a reminder to bring peace, joy and generosity to our everyday lives. Let's make every day a Christmas day.

Bruce Henry, Presiding Clerk,
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia

The Salvation Army Australia

It occurs to me again as we enter this Christmas season that we so easily default to a romanticised picture of the Christmas Story. As I look at a Christmas card with a picturesque drawing of the manger scene; the contentment and ease of Mary and Joseph, the animals, the other visitors, and of course the baby Jesus resting easily in the hay; and as I sing, *"But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes"*, I settle into this memory of the happiness of times past and the desire for everything to be as peaceful as that first Christmas day.

It is a challenge for us each to go back to scripture and hear again the message of the Gospel writers as they share the hope of a real Messiah, in a real place and in very real circumstances. It is a challenge for us to imagine what Mary and Joseph and the other participants really felt and experienced in the days of the first Christmas. It is a challenge for us to recognise that during the ordinary days, the difficult days, the vulnerable, even fearful days, in the harshness as well as in our happiness that God's great Salvation plan is shaping all things.

May we expect again this Christmas to be surprised by God at work through the reality of our world, and may God give us again a fresh revelation of all He is and all that we can be in Christ.

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

Uniting Church in Australia

This Christmas, the world seems darker and more dangerous than it has for the last few years.

We have come face to face with racism in this country in mourning the death of 15-year-old Noongar teenager Cassius Turvey.

Wars continue around the world, those we notice like Ukraine, and those that we no longer pay attention to or have barely noticed.

The climate is more and more unpredictable. In global and local efforts to address the climate crisis, we seem unable to make the changes needed soon enough. Across the year, we have watched floods swallow up towns, homes, livelihoods and hope.

The economy looks weak, the cost of living is rising and the poorest and most vulnerable bear the highest cost. We know many people will go hungry this Christmas, unable to afford a basic meal, let alone festive food.

In the face of all of this, I call to mind a Taizé chant: *'Within our darkest night you kindle a fire that never dies away, never dies away.'*

The birth of Jesus is the human face of God's light which lightens our darkness. The gospel of John tells us that the light of Christ is not overcome by the darkness. Jesus enters into the darkness but is not consumed by it.

Jesus is born into danger, lives in an occupied country, eats with the outcast, experiences the grief of a dear friend and dies a lonely death. In all of this, God's love triumphs.

Despite the darkness, Christmas reminds us that the desire to share the light of Christ cannot be extinguished.

The light of Christ shines in those who accompany people through flood and fire helping them to recover and rebuild. In those who feed the hungry and welcome the stranger. In ordinary acts of compassion, mercy and kindness.

The light of Christ breaks through whenever we stand against racism and injustice, build peace, demand action on climate and seek justice for the poor.

The light of Christ shines in people who witness to the good news of God with us through their lives, their words and their actions, sharing the hope they have in Jesus Christ.

Soon, we will be invited as a nation to seek light in the darkness of our colonial history and our present. A referendum will invite us to respond positively to the invitation of the Uluru Statement to create a Voice to Parliament and move towards a treaty with First Nations. I encourage people of faith, and all Australians, to engage with the Uluru Statement in hope that we might find ways to speak truth and walk together.

The good news of Christmas is that in Christ, the light of God, we are accompanied in our darkness, by a God who has entered into the darkest of places and rises to shine light and hope in the world and in our lives.

May your path be lightened by Christ this Christmas.

*Rev Sharon Hollis, President
Uniting Church in Australia Assembly*

Australian Baptist Ministries

Let's be real for a moment. Life isn't always a bed of roses. In fact, at times it can be brutal.

It is often in these tough times when true friends reveal themselves. They stay connected through the tough times and the good times. They are dependable. They are with you to support you, inspire you and sometimes they are there to pick up the pieces. You can't put a value on friends like these.

Christmas is the time we remember that God sent Jesus into our world to be a friend to people ... but what sort of friend? One of the names given to Jesus is Immanuel, which means 'God with us'. Jesus is a friend who doesn't desert you. He doesn't force himself upon you. His presence makes a real difference.

About 650 years before Jesus, a prophet called Zephaniah wrote about the type of friend Jesus would be. "He will take great delight in you," he wrote. "He will quieten you with his love. He will sing over you for joy." Jesus can bring calm to your life. He derives joy from being your friend and his joy has no cap on it. When God sent Jesus, it was an open invitation to share in His friendship and limitless capacity for joy.

Jesus, God's Christmas gift, makes friendship with God possible. A genuine heart response to Jesus brings you into a joy-filled friendship with God, who is the happiest being in the whole universe.

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

Australian Christian Churches - ACC

"Hope has a Name"

In a world that seems to be able to access anything at any time, there seems to be one commodity that so many people lack. Hope.

A constant stream of news about wars, natural disasters, inflation, and the cost of living can cause a sense of hopelessness to erode our expectation for the future. For many families, this Christmas season can look bleak.

Turn your thoughts to the first Christmas, to a baby born in unimpressive surroundings in a nondescript town called Bethlehem. Life was tough under the oppression of Roman occupation and heavy taxes. In such dark times came a message of good news that continues to bring great joy to all humanity.

Every year we celebrate Christmas by feasting with family and friends, and giving gifts to those we love. Yet may we remember that the spirit of Christmas goes beyond the circumstances we find ourselves in.

The greatest gift of all is the reason for the season: an expression of the extravagant love of God, given to mankind with the expressed desire of bringing them hope. God gave us His Son.

The message of Christmas is simple: Hope has a name – and that name is Jesus.

The Bible reminds us of this truth. ***'In His name the nations will put their hope.'*** (Matthew 12:21 NIV)

Our prayer for the people of our community this year is that, in the midst of an ever-changing, sometimes chaotic world, hearts will open to receive the hope in Jesus. May His hope fill you with love, joy and peace this Christmas.

Pastor Wayne Alcorn, National President
Australian Christian Churches - ACC
