



## 2023 Christmas Messages from Leaders of Christian Churches in Australia

We are soon to celebrate God's presence with us in the birth of Jesus and we also encounter the reality of our world and the difficulties so many face. There is such a contrast with the beauty and wonder of the Christmas story and the present-day reality of the Holy Lands.

The angels sum up the expectation of Jesus' birth in what they say to the shepherds in the hills around Bethlehem:

***'Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'***

Their song was full of hope and joy:

***'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, good will among people'.***

They enter Bethlehem and find the baby Jesus and worship.

Bethlehem now is within the West Bank of Palestine and is about 70km from Gaza. Not far at all. Tensions in the West Bank are also high and Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem will be muted and Manger Square may be without the usual festive lighting.

Our hearts echo the cry of the angels and we with them pray *'on earth peace and goodwill among people'*. Goodwill includes concern for the other, approval and affirmation, and actively expressed care. Much goodwill is needed!

When there is heartfelt goodwill it is a sign of peace being made real. Australia's First People need to experience goodwill from us all. Those overwhelmed by the cost of daily life need to receive goodwill in this special time of year. People in Gaza, Israel and the West Bank need goodwill from and for each other.

Our prayer this Christmas could be that all in distress will experience goodwill, love, peace and justice.

*Reverend John Gilmore, President*

*National Council of Churches in Australia*

(NB. In the Western Church, Christmas is celebrated on 25 December 2023.

Most Orthodox Churches will celebrate the Feast of the Nativity on 7 January 2024.)

#16 messages from National Church Leaders follow.

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

## Anglican Church of Australia

Without being too dramatic, we are living in very difficult times! There is a very real cost of living crisis that is felt by everyone, but especially lower income earners and long-term renters. Our nation has been at each other over the Voice to Parliament. There continues to be significant domestic violence towards women. The effect of global warming seems to be growing exponentially as evidenced by significant weather events including Cyclone Freddie, the longest lasting recorded tropical cyclone in history. There were catastrophic earthquakes in Turkey/Syria, Morocco, and Afghanistan. War continues in Ukraine as well as between Israel and Hamas, civil war in Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and others.

As a nation we seem exhausted. As communities and individuals, we are carrying a heavy burden and a weariness. It can appear that there is no hope, and we are left on our own.

There can be a very strong desire to switch off, to disconnect, to try to ignore some of the harsh realities of life.

But the good news of Christmas is that God did not disconnect but in fact leans into the world with all its challenges.

At his birth, Jesus entered into the messiness that was and is human life. And Jesus, now having died and been raised and ascended to heaven, continues to lean into our world. He continues to be faithful to his promise to be with us always. He continues to be there offering hope and peace and rest and love.

No matter what we are facing, Jesus coming as one of us, coming into our situation, continues to remind us that God is always there for us: he continues to lean in – no matter how tough the situation.

My prayer is that as we are reminded of the events of the first Christmas, we will know the reality of our God who leans into our reality and champions the cause of good and righteousness and peace. May you draw near to God and know his close presence with you.

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

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## Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese

**Christ is born, Glorify Him!**

***“And I will make my home among them and live with them; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”*** (2 Cor. 6:16)

God had sent prophets and even angels to call man back to Him, but it was necessary for the Creator himself to stoop to earth to lift man to heaven. The coming of the Saviour was to wipe off the dust from the image of God in man and to restore him to His rightful place as heir of His Father’s kingdom. That’s why Christmas time is the best time to pray to God and seek His love and blessings for the festive occasion and also for the year that is soon to arrive.

May Our Lord Jesus Christ, the newborn, shower you with His choicest blessings on Christmas and bless you with a holiday season full of happiness and smiles.

I wish you all a happy and blessed Merry Christmas.

*His Eminence Metropolitan Basilios, Archbishop  
Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines*

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## Assyrian Church of the East

***The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Because today a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord" And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"***  
(Luke 2: 8-14)

We pray the same glory of God that shone upon the Shepherds on the day of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ may enlighten the hearts and minds of all humanity, so that we all live in peace and harmony.

And that Christians together may celebrate this feast of Nativity in joy and peace, especially our brothers and sisters in the Middle East, Ukraine and Sudan.

We pray that this Holy Day will be filled with blessings, peace, and tranquillity all over our troubled world.

O' Lord Jesus Christ lead us to live in the path of your eternal light, You are the light of the world. He who follows You shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

May the blessings of His nativity be with us always.

*His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia AM, Metropolitan  
Assyrian Church of the East, Diocese of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon*

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## Catholic Church in Australia

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

One of our popular Christmas Carols begins with these words: *What child is this who, laid to rest on Mary's lap, is sleeping?* Very quickly, the carol moves to an answer: *This, this, is Christ the King, the babe, the son of Mary.*

Each year, as Christmas comes around, we are invited to let this same question - *what child is this* - arise in our minds and our hearts, and to reflect on the answers which emerge.

The question is, hopefully, one which matters to us. It is certainly one which matters to the Lord Jesus. You will recall the time when Jesus asked this very question of His apostles: *who do you say that I am?*

When Simon Peter, the leader of the twelve apostles, responded to Jesus on their behalf, he said, ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"***. It is an answer which is not so very different from the one given in the Christmas Carol. And it is the same answer which has been, and continues to be, at the heart of the Christian faith. Jesus is God among us as one of us. In His humanity, he is accessible to us, just as we are accessible to each other. We can know Him - and grow in our knowledge of Him - just as we come to know each other. And we can love Him - and grow in our love for Him - just as we can deepen our love for those closest to our hearts.

But Jesus occupies a unique place in human history, for His humanity both conceals and reveals His divinity, if only we look and listen with the eyes and ears of faith. In coming to know Him, we come to know God. Jesus said so himself. ***"To have seen me,"*** he once said to one of his apostles, ***"is to have seen the Father"***. When, especially in the pages of the gospels, we hear him speak we are hearing the words and voice of God. When we see him bringing hope and healing to people, we are witnesses to the compassion of God in action. In every encounter he has with people, we are being given an insight into who God really is, and what it is that God seeks to do and be in our lives.

This is why Jesus can proclaim Himself to be the Way, and the Truth, and the Life: not just one of many ways - but God's way; not just one truth competing with others - but God's truth; not just one option for life - but Life itself, the divine life, offered to us as a gift.

Our Judaea-Christian tradition rests on a profound belief: that we are made in the image and likeness of God. This truth reaches its highest expression in Jesus Christ who is, quite literally, the perfect living, human image and likeness of God. In Him we see who and what we are created and called to be - and in Him we find a companion on our life's journey who can, if we let Him, enable us to be who and what we are called to be.

This Christmas, like every Christmas, we are invited to hear once again God's call to us, made real and concrete in Jesus, to come to Him when we are weary and over-burdened and find our rest in Him; to remain among those people who once walked in darkness but who now walk in the light; to allow ourselves to hear deep within us the echo of His voice telling us not to be afraid for He is with us.

*What child is this who, laid to rest on Mary's lap, is sleeping?  
This, this is Christ the Lord - Come let us adore him.*

May this be a time of deep happiness, of reconciliation and peace, and of joyful hope for the future for you, your families and all those who are dear to you. A happy and holy Christmas to you all.

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

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## Chinese Methodist Church in Australia

### Who is the main character of Christmas?

Before Christmas, people like to prepare gifts for their loved ones. They like to write Christmas cards to wish them well, decorate their homes with lights, and put a bright star on top of their Christmas tree. During all this festivity, who is the main character of Christmas?

The best gift of Christmas is Jesus. Isaiah 9:6 says, ***"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*** Christmas reminds us that the birth of the Holy Child Jesus is God's finest gift to humankind.

The best blessing of Christmas is Jesus. John 10:10 says, ***"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*** Christmas is God's blessing of abundant life through the birth of Jesus.

The brightest light of Christmas is Jesus. John 8:12 says, ***"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"*** The birth of the Lord Jesus brings the light of life that all humankind can find.

May Jesus be the best gift you have ever received this Christmas. May Jesus be the most beautiful blessing in your life this Christmas, so that you may live life to the full. May Jesus be the light of your life this Christmas and illuminate your way ahead.

*Reverend Milton PK Nee, Bishop  
Chinese Methodist Church in Australia*

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## Churches of Christ in Australia

### The Best Gift of All

Imagine opening a gift and then treasuring only the wrapping. Would it not seem ludicrous for a box inside, perhaps containing an expensive pair of shoes or a watch, to then be discarded?

The Christmas season, with all its tinsel and trimmings, offers some shiny feelgood wrapping, too, but it is often sadly valued more than the gift it encloses.

Christmas surely packages up the best gift of all, the gift of freedom and redemption that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

His arrival two thousand years ago allowed everyone, then and since, to have someone give his life as a substitute. He was perfect and therefore qualified to pay through his death for our every shortcoming, sin, or shame.

That paved the way for us to connect with God for eternity. All we need do is receive this gift and open it. It is surely worth more than the Christmas wrapping of this busy festive season.

The gift would not have been possible had Jesus failed to come as God in human form. He descended and lived among us on that first Christmas to become, for us, for all time since, the best Christmas gift of all.

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

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## Coptic Orthodox Church

### Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions

#### Why the manger?

Why did the Lord choose to be born in a manger? The manger is an unclean place that is not fit for any normal mother to give birth. What's the significance to be born amongst the animals that are mostly set to be slaughtered?

We will mention five reasons that perhaps agree with the Lord's mission and His spirit.

1. Finding that this was the only place available for the King of Kings to be born - resembles the sad state of the world and that Christ just wants to be born in our hearts.
2. It was the nature of the Lord as the true lamb going to the slaughter to be born in a manger - predicting his sacrificial nature.
3. To choose to be born in the poorest of places - to show there is no prejudice with the Lord who treats everyone equally, and gives attention to the vulnerable.
4. To give man the greatest lesson about humility - how humility is the opposite of pride.
5. To start His journey towards the cross in a symbolic way that defines his mission and vision towards our salvation by denying himself of every comfort and worldly pleasure.

On behalf of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Australia we wish everyone a wonderful and blessed Feast of Nativity. May the lessons of the manger address all of our spiritual needs towards a joyful Feast of Nativity.

*Very Rev. Dr. Father Abanoub Attalla  
Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Melbourne & Affiliated Regions*

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# Coptic Orthodox Church

## Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions

### Message for the Glorious Feast of the Nativity 2023

On this great and joyous occasion of the Feast of the Nativity, it is my pleasure to wish you all the blessings of the Mystery of the Incarnation. Our celebration of the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is a celebration of the wondrous Mystery of the Incarnation, which reveals God's love for us.

He accepted to come to our world and assume complete human nature with a rational soul, as St. John the Theologian wrote, **"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"** (John 1:14).

The main purpose of the Incarnation is our salvation from the dominion of sin, death and corruption. This is revealed when the Archangel proclaimed that the name of the Child is to be "Jesus", which means "Saviour".

In the Annunciation of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Archangel Gabriel told the Holy Virgin, the Mother of Light, **"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus"**. Again the Archangel appeared to Joseph and revealed to him the mystery of the Holy Conception; he told him, **"Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins"** (Matthew 1:20-21).

Thus, God's goal to save us from the dominion of sin, death, and corruption was achieved through the Incarnation.

We rejoice because the wondrous Incarnation of God the Word reveals God's love for us. Therefore, we ought to **"love Him because He first loved us"** (1 John 4:19). Furthermore, God's love for us compels us to love one another in a practical way through our actions. St. John reminds us, **"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"** (1 John 4:11), and **"My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth"** (1 John 3:18).

We celebrate Christmas this year amidst worldwide problems, especially economic hardships. Many families, especially those with limited income, face the burden of rising inflation and increase in the prices of basic necessities and commodities. We pray that God may provide for everyone from His abundant riches and save the world from wars and inflation.

However, we also are required to remember our needy brothers and sisters, and actively participate in benevolent works, remembering St. Paul's word, **"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith"** (Galatians 6:9-10).

Moreover, We pray that Christ the Prince of peace, grant peace tranquillity and harmony to the world particularly in Sudan, the Middle East and Ukraine and other parts of the world.

May God bless our country Australia and bestow prosperity and harmony upon its people.

In Christ

*His Grace, Bishop Daniel*

*Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions*

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## Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand

***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill among men”*** (Luke 2:14)

Some two thousand years ago, joy and peace were heralded by the angels through the birth of Jesus which was witnessed by the Magi of the East and the shepherds. Though this message of peace and love was embraced by few and has transmitted to our days, humanity today is far from achieving that peace and harmony as one can imagine.

Currently the whole world is in turmoil, the war in Ukraine, the war in Gaza, the ethnic cleansing of over one hundred thousand Armenians from Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), just to mention a few. All these because of the greed of mankind, multinational corporations needing more raw materials to enrich their pockets and in so doing, do not stop against anything. As a result, tens of thousands of people are killed, many more maimed, the poor gets even poorer, and many starve to death while tonnes of food are wasted by the rich throughout the world.

The Christians in the Middle East and so the Armenians, 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. Because the world at large did not react on this unjust war, thousands of people were killed, tens of thousands wounded and many were forced to leave their ancestral homeland. Now Azeris, empowered by this fact, realised their scorch earth policy eliminating ethnic Armenians from Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and forcefully exiling more than one hundred thousand Armenians from their native land.

Whilst here at home, a month before Christmas we see Christmas trees all around, Christmas carols heralding with joy the birth of Christ, many hold “Christmas” parties just to eat, drink, socialise, have a good time and exchange gifts, while the hero of the event, JESUS, is noticeably absent, and his message is not heard.

As Christians it is our duty to reintroduce Jesus to our society. ***“Peace I leave with you; not as the world gives, do I give to you”*** (John 15: 28). A peace by which one is in harmony with his inner self with God, with the people and the world at large. ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you...by this all will know that you are my disciples”*** (John 13: 34). As Jesus did so, we through our love to fellow man, must care for the poor, the sick, for the animals, nature, thus helping the wounded world to heal.

It is time for humanity to fulfil the vision of Isaiah the Prophet ***“They shall beat their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore”*** (Isaiah 2:4) or ***“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food”*** (Isaiah 65:25).

Let us heed and follow the words and the example of the newborn Prince of Peace, let us be the true custodians of this world bringing joy and happiness to all, where people can live in peace and create harmony.

**Christ is born and revealed, blessed is the revelation of Christ.**

With Prayers,

*Archbishop Haigazoun Najarian, Primate  
Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand*

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## Greek Orthodox Church of Australia

Protocol No: 2895

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

"Come, let us rejoice in the Lord, as we tell about this mystery. The middle wall of separation has been broken down; the fiery sword has turned back, the Cherubim permits access to the tree of life; and I partake of the delight of Paradise, from which I was cast out because of disobedience. For the exact Image of the Father, the express Image of his eternity, takes the form of a servant, coming forth from a virgin Mother; and He undergoes no change. He remained what He was, true God; and He took up what he was not, becoming human in His love for humanity. Let us cry out to Him: You who were born from a Virgin, O God, have mercy on us."

(Troparion, Great Vespers of the Feast of the Nativity)

The mystery of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ has established "once for all" (Heb. 10:10) a new reality, which not only embraces every human person, and indeed, all created existence, invisible and visible, but allows all to truly participate in the fullness of the salvific and transformative divine grace it boundlessly and abundantly imparts.

Out of His infinite love, the Word and Son of God the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, without ceasing to be "true God from true God", took on the very fullness of what it means to be human, except sin, in order to heal, renew and recreate human nature, not only restoring it to its "original beauty" but raising it to participation in divine life. The mystery of salvation is precisely the refashioning of the human person as truly human by "**partaking of the divine nature**" (2 Peter 1:4).

This mystery of Christ's divine-humanity, which is an ontological reality for Christ, becomes in and through Him an existential reality for each and every person. In order for us however to experience and participate in the mystery of Christ's divine-humanity, that it may truly become a reality in our lives, we must first and foremost strive to make Christ the centre of our heart, indeed the very centre of our existence, with true faith, love and hope in His person. By following Christ, who is the source and fullness of truth, love, and goodness, and fulfilling His life-giving commandments, in repentance and love for each other, we can truly live the fullness of life, who is Christ Himself, here and now and eternally in His heavenly kingdom.

May we open our minds and hearts to Christ our Lord and God, so that we may be refashioned and renewed by the mystery of His love.

Wishing all a blessed and joyous Christmas, I remain,  
Prayerfully yours,

*Archbishop Makarios, Primate  
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia*

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## Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand

*“Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”*

Did you realise that words of Joseph are not recorded in the whole of the nativity story. We hear ABOUT him, but we don't hear FROM him. Joseph disappears from the stories of the New Testament, with the last mention of him being the episode where twelve-year old Jesus remains behind in the temple.

Joseph doesn't speak but he tells us what it means to be held fast by a story that is so much greater than us. We might say his actions speak louder than words, as he teaches us what it means to step into each new day with hope.

Joseph discovered that his fiancé, Mary, was pregnant with a child that was not his. In the ancient world at the time, this was a difficult thing for an engaged couple. His society gave Joseph the option to publicly renounce her so she could be punished.

But Joseph resolves to quietly break off the engagement. In this decision, our “voiceless” man of this Christmas story teaches us good moral behaviours such as: Be kind to others. Sometimes retreating is a good choice. We can lose for the sake of another.

But there is so much more for us in Joseph's story.

In what happens next to Joseph, we are reminded that the heart of this Christmas story is not something that Joseph has done, but some that God does. This is something extraordinary and unexpected, that God does through Joseph, for the world.

Just when Joseph thought that he had carefully mapped out how things were going to be resolved, an angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream and tells him, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

The angel's words alter Joseph's world forever. He finds himself caught up in God's plan to reach out in love to the world, to deal with sin and evil at work in us. The angel's words made it clear to Joseph, that what was happening with his beloved Mary was God's work.

From this revelation, Joseph discovers that he is much more than just a man doing the right thing by his Mary. God calls Joseph to speak something that has been spoken by millions and millions of people since that angel visit in Nazareth centuries ago. With all his seeming silence in the nativity story, Joseph is given the privilege to speak the name of the Lord Jesus. The angel had commanded Joseph, “You are to name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.”

How do we know that Joseph was changed forever? His actions speak louder than words. As a changed man, he took Mary to be his wife, with no regard for what people might say about him taking on someone else's baby. As a changed man, he welcomes the privilege of providing fatherly care to the boy who would one day be nailed to a cross for the salvation of the world.

The bright hope of the Christmas story is the message that God has broken into our world to change us. God's calls us to join in this new way that anticipates God at work on the frontiers, in unexpected places as we live a people of hope in the presence of a gracious God. In our contemporary world we are confronted by news of wars and conflicts, at home and far away. We ask God to give us the faithfulness of Joseph, that we would find our place in this hopeful way of the “Prince of Peace-making”, acting in kindness and mercy in the Lord's name.

On behalf of the people of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand, I pray a hopeful and joyful Christmas for you and for your loved ones.

*"Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."*

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

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## Religious Society of Friends in Australia (Quakers)

**"Peace on Earth, goodwill to all men"**

Christmas is that time when many of us joyfully celebrate the birth and the life of Jesus of Nazareth and pay particular attention to his example and teaching of peace and love.

We 'spread the love' with family and Friends and it's usually a happy time where we eat together and share gifts. Do we also remember those who do not have friends or family and can we find some way to include them in the festival?

These last few months have been the antithesis of peace on earth. For the Middle East and the Ukraine and for other conflicts in the world, hatred and mistrust prevail and peace seems a long way away.

Quakers and other people of faith know that true peace starts from within, from intimacy with Spirit or the Light, from a deep peace which can guide our life. We all have a role to play in building up the conditions for peace in the world, for rejecting conflict and working for justice.

The joy and love that abounds at Christmas time can give us a sense of hope and remind us that

*'Though love is weak and hate is strong,  
Yet hate is short and love is very long'. (from Naylor Sonnet #3)*

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

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## The Salvation Army Australia

There's a beautiful song that says....

*Light of the world  
You stepped down into darkness.  
Opened my eyes, let me see.  
  
Humbly you came to the earth you created,  
All for love's sake became poor.  
  
Here I am to worship  
Here I am to bow down  
Here I am to say that You're my God*

Light of the world. Hope of the world. Jesus came. God with skin on his face. Came to show us how to live like him and for him. Saviour, Lord, King.

That's who we worship at this time of year. That's who we worship at all times of the year. This beautiful Jesus.

And it seems the world needs a whole lot of light right now...

- Israel and Palestine

- Ukraine and Russia
- Cost of living crisis
- Housing crisis
- Shifting values
- A postmodern, post Christian world

A world that sometimes seems unstable.

And, still this beautiful Jesus steps down into darkness, and asks his people to do the same. In a very dark room, a lit candle or torchlight changes the darkness. We are called to step into the darkness, and just like Jesus, bring light to our world.

Pray for the people of the nations, for aid, for negotiators, for peace.

Step into the darkness in our nation. Light comes from...

Those who form “real community” and love beautifully.  
 Those who serve day after day.  
 Those who find and provide housing.  
 Those who represent and share Jesus beautifully.  
 Those who live like and for Jesus.

Light of the world. Hope of the world.

Every day, we have opportunities to be that.

I think we all need that this time of the year. Light, hope, love

Just as Jesus came as light to our darkness, I invite you to be light into someone else’s world this Christmas.

**Matthew 5:14-16 *“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.***

Step in. Step up. Shine! Jesus invites you to. The world needs you to.

Have a wonderful Christmas, and may you be the means by which someone else might find the true meaning too.....light, life, hope, peace, joy.

Bless you.

*Commissioner Miriam Gluyas, Territorial Commander  
 The Salvation Army, Australia*

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## Uniting Church in Australia

In this season of celebration, the mood seems far from celebratory in many places.

In Australia many people are struggling to afford food and shelter. Others have watched their homes and livelihoods burnt in fires or destroyed by drought. Violence and war continues in places like West Papua, Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Ukraine. Some we notice. Others we don't.

This Christmas we will sing carols which speak of stillness and silence on the night of Jesus birth. At the same time, we watch and read about the violence taking place in these same lands, death and suffering that is almost beyond fathoming.

Our hearts cry out as we see hospitals bombed, hostages held, babies dying for lack of basic care and homes crumbling. What does it mean to say the Prince of Peace has been born?

The story of Jesus' birth is not one that occurs in a fairy tale world of stillness and calm. Rather Jesus comes as a vulnerable baby into a precarious world, born into empire, shadowed by violence.

Jesus' birth is the announcement by God that God wills the end of violence and suffering. Jesus is God's way of standing in solidarity with us, arriving into all our brokenness and beauty. His coming is a herald of God's joy, hope and peace.

Christmas invites us to meet God in all of life, our despair, our suffering, our wonder, our celebration. Let us rejoice in the confidence that God dwells with each of us and the whole world in love, a love that heals our broken heartedness and helps us find peace and joy.

Happy Christmas!

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

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## Australian Christian Churches - ACC

### 'God with us'

Christmas is a celebration of God's response to a lost and lonely human race. He demonstrated His immense love for us through the gift of His Son – Emmanuel – which means '*God with us*'.

The Bible tells us that Jesus '*became flesh and dwelt among us*' (John 1:14). He came to be with us, with the mission to make a way for us to live in relationship with God forever.

What a wonderful message for a world that shows the growing effects of loneliness. There is something within us that cries out for a sense of belonging. The shifts in modern society have caused us to be more isolated than ever, despite having so many ways to connect to each other. Loneliness, it seems, is at epidemic proportions.

This season gives the Church, and individuals alike, an incredible opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. As people gather to enjoy the festivities with family and friends, let's spare a thought for those whose loneliness is amplified at this time of the year.

Mother Teresa put it so succinctly: 'The problem with the world is that we draw our family circle too small'.

As we celebrate the wonder of a God's extravagant love, expressed in Emmanuel, may we seek to enlarge our circles. Let's be people that look around us with the hope of finding those who are

standing alone; and open wide our hearts and doors to those who need to know that they are oved by God and loved by us.

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## **Australian Baptist Ministries**

Christmas is not what it used to be. The Christmas in the Bible was less a season and more an occasion.

We spend a lot of money; Christ was born into poverty. We consider Christmas a 'family time'; Mary and Joseph were Internally Displaced Persons (and later refugees). We hang lights and ornaments and decorations; the manger was, at best, lined with clean straw. We give lifeless objects that shine, taste good, or use batteries; God gave a person — His Son Jesus Christ.

Everything about the coming of Christ contrasts with the ways in which we 'celebrate the season.' We embrace the culture of consumption with little more than a sideways glance at the claims of Christ.

I'm no saint in this regard. My own inconsistencies shine like a spotlight amidst the tiny flashlights of other people. But I desire to be different. The first step towards change is acknowledgment. We need to diagnose and name the disease before prescribing surgery.

My disease is holy secularism. The symptoms include an honourable mention for Christ, but He is mostly excluded. Look around and you'll see it at epidemic proportions. Many of us have unintentionally become infectious carriers.

The disease drives us to catalogues more than to Christ; it draws us to shopping centres and distracts us with sales. We want presents with a bow, not the presence of God. Give me the latest gadget, not the gospel truth. Sing about Santa, not the Saviour. Open the wallet, but not the home.

Of course, we'll join in the carols, listen to the talks, and even add angels to the tree. However, the Christ-event which calls us to simple gratitude and humility, morphs into a season of impulse-spending, binge-buying, and excess. We use sacred terms to justify ourselves ... generosity, thoughtfulness, love, and family. But sometimes we let the marketplace, not the Master, define those terms.

I suspect the waiting list for this spiritual surgery might be long. But somewhere deep within us, an authentic light pierces the darkness and compels us to consider why Christ came in the first place. Search 'Luke 2 Message Bible' in your browser for a booster shot.

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