

## 2017 Christmas Messages from Leaders of Christian Churches in Australia

Can you imagine the love and reverence with which the angel said Jesus' name, when the angel spoke to Joseph?

*"You are to name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21)

Can you imagine Joseph's tone of voice when he told Mary the name given for their child?

Can you imagine Mary, aware of the child growing in her, speaking Jesus' name? First with Joseph in the intimacy of their home, later to the shepherds and the Magi.

We can imagine them all looking at the baby, saying Jesus' name with that same angelic reverence and love.

It is always very beautiful for us to hear Jesus' name spoken with adoration. Our spirit soars, yes?

This is one gift we can all give, one form of evangelism we can all share this Christmas and into 2018.

As we know, our Australia needs to hear Jesus' name re-said with love and reverence. So there can be salvation. So there can be healing and wholeness.

May it be so.

Amen.

*Bishop Philip Huggins, President  
National Council of Churches in Australia*

*(NB. In the Western Church, Christmas is celebrated on December 25.  
Most Orthodox Churches will celebrate the Feast of the Nativity on January 6.)*

The 12 messages follow.

---

For more information, contact the NCCA Secretariat on 8259 0800.

## Anglican Church of Australia

One of the most memorable and best loved Christmas hymns in the English speaking world is 'O little town of Bethlehem'. No wonder, because it speaks of an enduring spiritual truth: the need humanity has for a Redeemer.

We have lived through another year where inhumanity to fellow image bearers of the divine Creator has brought tears of suffering. One of our senior clergy has just advised me that 45 people were killed in his home village in South Sudan, including aid workers seeking to alleviate suffering. No wonder the weight of the world's troubles falls so heavily on us.

Even in these worst of times salvation is at hand through God's precious gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. 'No ear may hear His coming but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in.'

Perhaps there is no greater contradiction than that between the glory that is offered to us in Christ and the failure that we too often accept as the inevitable consequence of our human nature.

Let us have thankful hearts as we celebrate the giving of so great a mercy, 'God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.' (Romans 5.8) What an opportunity for a new way, a living way has been given to struggling humanity in the birth of Jesus! 'O holy Child of Bethlehem descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in, be born to us today.'

May you have a blessed celebration of our Lord's birth and may his peace turn hearts from cruelty and inhumanity.

*Archbishop Philip Freier, Primate  
Anglican Church of Australia*

-----

## Catholic Church in Australia

Dear Friends,

Christ Jesus is our peace! He is 'the still point in a turning world' full of violence and conflict.

At Christmas, each year, we Christians recommit ourselves to becoming peace-makers and seeking reconciliation. Christ has become one of us to give us peace and joy.

But will we accept his invitation?

The challenges are great, for many are resisting the call of the Prince of Peace.

Our world is experiencing an escalation of conflict and violence. Acts of deadly terror and the threat of war seem very real. Pope Francis is constantly crying out: 'No more War' but the weapons seem to be multiplying.

Closer to home, our nation seems beset by a lack of civility in public discourse and a lack of vision. There is lots of talk about who does or does not 'belong' in Parliament.

Christmas reminds us, however, that there are deeper issues of 'belonging'.

Jesus wished to be close to the most disadvantaged. He was born in a manger... Let us not forget that a manger is a container for feeding animals! There was no any room at the inn. Let us make sure we Australians welcome people, especially the poor, the refugees and all who are left out.

We must not give up, despite everything we are seeing, and everything we are hearing.

Let us pray to make more room for Christ in our lives, so that he may accomplish his work in us. Let us also act this Christmas to become peacemakers. The fragile child in the manger cries out to us to make 'room at the inn' for all those who are excluded.

*Archbishop Denis J Hart,  
Archbishop of Melbourne, President  
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*

-----

### **Chinese Methodist Church in Australia**

It is easy to imagine the power of God displayed in the wonders of the galaxies. It is far more difficult to imagine how the fullness of God could reside in one man without being any less present in the whole universe. That's the mystery and the revelation of Christmas.

Christmas speaks of how God so loved the people of the world that He was willing to limit himself in one man, Jesus Christ, so that He could walk with us in a world that was corrupted by unrighteousness and wickedness of sinful human making. In such a world, he experienced the stages of our human development, shared our joys and sorrows, went about doing good, and thereby revealing to us the true likeness of God in man. Jesus Christ finally died to save us from sin.

The Christmas story, however, does not end at the grave, for Christ rose on the third day to prove his power over sin and death. This Christmas, may we all give thanks to God for being truly present with us in Christ. May His Spirit fill us and move us to constrain our own selfish and sinful desires, and to strive to live our lives pure and holy life pleasing unto the Lord. Like Christ, we might have to suffer for righteousness in a sinful world, but we must not cease to be bearers of the truth, love, and justice of God.

Let us courageously continue to live as Scriptural Christians i.e. displaying Christlikeness – a life of personal holiness and social holiness, that we might be the signs of His living and transforming presence to one another and to the whole world.

*Dr James Kwang, Bishop  
Chinese Methodist Church in Australia*

-----

### **Churches of Christ in Australia**

Raymond Carver's pithy poem 'Late Fragment' captures something of the yearning of every human heart:

*And did you get what  
You wanted from this life, even so?  
I did  
And what did you want?  
To call myself beloved, to feel myself  
Beloved on the earth*

At Christmas time, most of us gather with friends and family. Our time, our gifts and our eating together are symbols of love and belonging.

For Christians, commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ connects us with a transforming message: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son". (John 3:16).

We are not alone in the universe, or insignificant. Our lives are not meaningless. Rather, we are beloved: Christ was born and lived and died and rose to express God's profound love for us.

Did you get what you wanted from this life, even so?

My prayer for this Christmas is that you will experience what all of us really want: that you will feel yourself beloved on the earth.

For you are... more than you could ever imagine.

*Janet Woodlock, Federal Coordinator  
Churches of Christ in Australia*

---

## **The Congregational Federation**

### **The word became flesh and dwelt among us.**

We are all used to seeing the nativity scenes: Mary and Joseph with the infant Jesus in the manger, flanked by wise men and shepherds and around them the animals of the stable. Overhead are angels and a star. Nativity scenes are said to go back to Saint Francis of Assisi in 1223. Staged in a cave, Saint Francis' first scene used real humans and animals cast in the Biblical role to emphasise the worship of Christ rather than materialism and gift giving.

Actually, the nativity scene never happened. It's not in the Gospels of Mark and John. Luke described in his gospel an angel announcing the birth of Jesus to shepherds who visited the humble site where Jesus was found lying in a trough for cattle feed. When Matthew wrote his Gospel, Jesus was visited by important people, "Wise men from the east" led by a star which they initially thought as taking them to King Herod.

So, there are no shepherds and angels in Matthew's story and no wise men and star in Luke's. Furthermore, it seems that the wise men arrived sometime after the birth, not as soon as it happened.

All this is very interesting but we are in danger of missing the point, and it was John who got to the heart of the matter. The magnificent, processional introduction to his Gospel started with the famous line: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*, coming to the climax:

*The word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

The angels told the shepherds and the shepherds went to see *the word become flesh*. The wise men followed a star to find *the word become flesh*. The pivotal point of the whole story. The genealogies listing Jesus' ancestors, the stories about his cousin John the Baptist, about his mother Mary visited by an angel, all lead up to *the Word became flesh*. The abstract, unseen unapproachable God had become visible.

But there's more: *and dwelt among us*. The Word dwelt among us. A simple single appearance was not enough: Jesus had to live out his life in our world, with all its emotions, challenges and celebrations. His teachings and the example of his final sacrifice are only meaningful if he fully shared our experiences. We have little time for leaders – teachers, ministers, politicians or anybody else – who tell us how to live our lives without having been in our shoes. Jesus walked in our shoes and still behaved with love, compassion and courage that we can only aspire to.

At Christmas *the word became flesh*. Hope came into the world. May we all embrace that hope to carry out Christ's own mission – and his great commission to us – to change the world.

And may his blessings be with all of us, each and every one, this Christmas and forevermore.

*Dr Joe Goodall, Moderator*

*The Congregational Federation of Australia and New Zealand*

-----

## **Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions**

### **The Feast of the Nativity 2017**

It is my pleasure to congratulate you on the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Christ said, "*I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly.*" (John 10:10).

Christ is our Good Shepherd who guides, feeds and enlightens us in our journey through the wilderness of this world.

Christ is the Good Shepherd who loved us and gave Himself up for us.

Christ is the Good Shepherd who protects us from the snatching wolves. He opens His arms to joyfully receive us.

May Christ our Good Shepherd bless and protect our beloved country Australia and its people and government.

*Bishop Daniel*

*Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions*

-----

## **Religious Society of Friends in Australia (Quakers)**

At Christmas we are mindful of the central message of Christ, to love one another. At Christmas we make a special effort to reach out to others, to be in touch with distant relatives and friends, to share gifts as symbols of goodwill.

May we be mindful of those, close at hand and in distant places, who suffer pain and oppression, violence and uncertainty. May we be bearers of peace and goodwill to others this Christmas, and every day of the year ahead.

*Jo Jordan, Presiding Clerk,*

*Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia*

-----

## **The Salvation Army**

### **A refreshing reminder**

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus,

Every Christmas we are given a **refreshing reminder** of the joy, hope, love and peace that can be ours, if we take the opportunity to stop and contemplate amidst all the noise in our lives.

As the angel Gabriel announced, "*Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Saviour has just been born in David's town, a Saviour who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger.*" Luke 2:9-12 (MSG)

The coming of Jesus on this earth was good news, but for most who received it, they took time to fully comprehend its significance. It was news that did not come in the manner the world expected. He was a baby born in a stable. An innocent child, professed to be the Saviour of the world. It wasn't until He grew into a man – unlike any other before or after him – humanity realised the consequence of the truth, justice, love, joy and peace He would bring.

His coming was a **refreshing reminder** that no matter how lowly His birth, it was a promise of a Saviour for all humanity who reminded us to love our neighbour, not to worry about earthly needs and do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This Christmas, we encourage you to extend love to all people, just in the way Jesus did. To the child without a parent. To the senior citizen without a family. To the homeless person who needs something to eat.

For over 130 years, the Salvos have lived, loved and fought alongside others to transform Australia one life at a time. Our commitment to thousands of Australians in need throughout this Christmas season – and throughout every day of every year – is to help, love, care and work towards a better future. With the love of Jesus, we will make this commitment a reality. We thank the many thousands of Australians who have supported and walked alongside us in 2017 as we continue to in our quest to bring hope to those who need it.

We pray you experience the hope of the **refreshing reminder** of Jesus this Christmas season. From us both and the entire team at The Salvation Army Australia, have a safe and blessed Christmas. God bless you each one.

Blessings,

*Floyd and Tracy Tidd, National Leaders  
The Salvation Army Australia*

-----

## **Uniting Church in Australia**

### **The Gift of Love**

Friends, in the letter to the Hebrews we read: “*Let us consider [thoughtfully] how we may encourage one another to love and to do good deeds*” (AMP 10:24).

In the past year, both here in Australia and globally, the ugly face of humanity has been on display. The hurtful marriage debate in Australia, attacks on the humanity of people of the Muslim faith, the horrible abuse of the Rohingya people, and the tragedy facing millions of people seeking asylum and the inhumanity shown by some governments including our own, and the terrible trauma experienced by so many and revealed by the Royal Commission into the Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Let us thoughtfully respond to the pain experienced by so many through seriously considering how we might encourage one another to loving actions and to good deeds, in response to a loving God, who in the birth of a baby makes possible a new beginning for all humanity.

At Christmas we give and receive, but the most important gift we have to give is love and likewise the most precious gift we can receive is unconditional love. This is God's gift in Jesus and it is my prayer on behalf of the Uniting Church in Australia for you and for all humanity.

*Stuart McMillan, President  
Uniting Church in Australia*

-----

## Australian Christian Churches

If you have ever walked in the dark, you will know how easy it is to lose your way. There are no visible reference points so it can be confusing. You can find yourself overcome with fear, not knowing what surrounds you. The daily news presents rapid social change, governments in crisis and human tragedy resulting in chaos, uncertainty and pain. It can be a shadowy, dark world, and this is where so many people find themselves – desperately struggling to find their way in the dark.

Hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a world in darkness,

*"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."* (Isaiah 9:2)

That great light is Jesus. At the heart of our celebration of Christmas is the wonder that when Jesus came to us in human form, light pierced the darkness and everything changed.

The Christmas story is a message of light, which pushes the darkness aside to see Jesus in the spotlight. His presence turns the light on, bringing with it clarity, hope, joy and peace. Maybe this year you have been trying to navigate your journey through dark and shadowed places and spaces. Know that God loves you and gave His Son, Jesus, who in His own words, is 'The Light of the World'; the One who can bring light into the darkness and heaviness of life. Allow Him to shine His light on you, so you discover His heart towards you, and then, allow Him to help you shine for Him and be a light to others.

My prayer is that this Christmas you will encounter and experience the love and light of the world – Jesus.

*Rev Wayne Alcorn, ACC National President  
Australian Christian Churches (ACC)*

-----

## Australian Baptist Ministries

### Why Christmas?

Christmas 2017 is upon us with all its accompanying celebration, connection and cheer for many and its tensions and loneliness for others. When we consider the effort exerted in present buying, food preparation and events organisation, the question hovers like a helicopter parent, "Why do this? Why go to so much effort? What's to be gained?"

The answer lies in our reason for having Christmas. Even if we're fortunate enough to possess the means to provide a significant celebration, but don't have a meaning for doing so, there is an emptiness of soul in what we do. What's it all about, then? After the candles, carols, community street parties and consumption of food and alcohol, are we left wondering again, why we did it all. It was fun for the kids, maybe families caught up, traditions are compelling, but what is the foundation, the source, the reason, the MEANING of it all?

For a sense of meaning we need to be reminded of the ancient story of a baby born over 2000 years ago, in a dirty stable, in a tiny town, in a remote part of the Roman Empire. A baby whose birth was heralded by angelic beings and honoured by foreign astrologers, but who was however to grow to adulthood in obscurity. So what meaning can be construed from the story of his birth? A birth that has snowballed around the world so that now, in this generation, it's honoured by a plethora of culture-specific celebrations?

What was exceptional about this baby, which made him unlike any other? First his birth was predicted in ancient Jewish scriptures. Secondly, his mother was a virgin when she gave birth to him. And thirdly, he was confirmed as the Son of God because of the healing miracles he would perform and because of his radical, counter-cultural teaching about love of God and humanity. His life gave meaning to the lives of people who followed him, even when that meant personal suffering, and continues till now to inspire love and compassion in ordinary people.

Victor Frankl author and Holocaust survivor surmised that the three facets of the current mass neurotic syndrome in young people of depression, aggression and addiction are due to the "existential vacuum" of feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness.

It seems all of us need a reason or meaning, not just at Christmas, but also for the whole of life. Those who were privileged to glimpse the baby Jesus and catch the wonder of his exceptional birth, or later to be compelled by the truth of his words and life to follow him forever, were captured by meaning. The world now made sense. They were aware that God was with them. Likewise God is with us in all the mess of our lives. As The Message translation of John 3:16 puts it: *God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.*

God is the source of meaning for Christmas and a relationship with God gives us meaning for life.

*The Reverend Keith Jobberns, National Ministries Director  
Australian Baptist Ministries*

-----

### **Seventh-day Adventist Church**

"Jesus is the gift who keeps on giving"

"It is more blessed to give than receive", at least this is what Jesus teaches. I know that as a child I struggled with that. I enjoyed the receiving part, especially when it came to birthdays and Christmas. However, as I have grown and matured, I have come to appreciate giving even more.

Jesus has given us the perfect example of what it means to give. Jesus gave up heaven to live on this earth so that we could receive. The whole reason Jesus came to this earth - was to give. He came to give an example of how to live our lives to the full. He came to give His life so that we might receive the **free gift** of eternal life. Jesus gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit before He returned to heaven so that we could receive the love of God in our life. These are all amazing gifts.

*Michael Worker  
Seventh-day Adventist Church*

-----