

2018 Christmas Messages from Leaders of Christian Churches in Australia

As the angels sing 'Glory to God in the Highest'.

Our son was listening at a distance as his four year old daughter told the Christmas Story to another four year old, using a picture book.

...“and then these angels came. So the paddock people went to see the baby Jesus for themselves..!” she exclaimed with much delight.

The little one can't read yet so shepherds do look like people living in a paddock.

It is wonderful that she knows already how special is Jesus.

The Christmas story reaches everyone.

All generations are covered. All cultures too.

We have at home Nativity sets from every continent, culturally distinct yet each drawing us to focus on the Christ - child in the manger.

When we had a family party recently, a musical son played banjo and we all sang: “What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of”...

Jesus is God's invitation to the world to live in love together:

One human family, gifted with life, together on a tiny planet in a vast universe of divine creation.

A child can grasp that to love one another in the way and spirit of Jesus, is the deepest truth.

St John conveyed it, having long pondered what he had seen:

“God is love and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them”. (1 John1:16).

As we gather for Christmas, we know how much love is needed to give many people healing and hope.

Along with the Carols and the Christmas Bowl on your table at Christmas, maybe you might also like to sing together “what the world needs now is love, sweet love”...

Christmas joy and peace,

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

(NB. In the Western Church, Christmas is celebrated on 25 December 2018.

Most Orthodox Churches will celebrate the Feast of the Nativity on 7 January 2019.)

12 messages follow.

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

Anglican Church of Australia

A service celebrating multicultural Melbourne at St Paul's Cathedral late last month was a marvellous event. There were people from almost every continent: joyful, laughing, listening, dancing, singing and eating together. What a delight! The Cathedral was alive with colour, sound and movement. It highlighted what we can be together, in service of God and each other. As Saint Peter told those gathered at the home of the Roman Centurion, Cornelius,: "God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."

That night in Cornelius' home was a time of joy, like the multicultural service at the Cathedral. That sort of joy, which flows from the One who came as a baby born in Bethlehem, brings hope of peace, hope of dreams fulfilled.

It is a joy that transcends the painful circumstances in which so many people find themselves. Recently I was in Amman, Jordan, in the midst of the terrible tensions wracking the Middle East, and yet I saw and heard the joy of God's people.

Christmas is a time for joy and peace. Yes, it can be sentimentalised and trivialised by all the busyness and commercialisation of what should be a simple celebration, and it can be challenged by the pace, pressures and pain of ordinary life. But reflecting on Jesus Christ and how he fulfilled the promises of God is inspiring.

Christmas cards speak of joy and peace. Christmas carols sing of joy and peace: joy and peace in the birth of a baby in a land troubled then as now.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, trusted in God and his promises. Luke's Gospel tells us that she treasured up these things in her heart and pondered them. Perhaps she glimpsed what we can glimpse this side of Jesus' birth, death and resurrection: a vision of a world restored, made whole. As the famous carol puts it:

Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim
Christ is born in Bethlehem!

May joy and peace be yours this Christmas.

*The Most Reverend Dr Philip L. Freier, Primate,
Anglican Church of Australia*

Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese

During this holy season of peace and grace, disclosed to us through the great feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour, may the heavenly doors be cast open to our prayers and petitions; bringing the promise of spiritual rest, renewal and rebirth.

As the Shepherds and Wise Men accepted the invitation to “come and see” the miracle of the Incarnation of the Son of God, we are also invited to “come and see” the Son of the Virgin, glorifying Him and His grace.

I ask our incarnate Lord to keep us, strengthen us, and open our hearts to the miraculous and divine mystery of His Condescension in the flesh, so that we may unite our ourselves to God, and one another.

I offer my warmest greetings, good will and well wishes for the upcoming season of Christmas, and a very happy New Year.

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Metropolitan Basilios, Archbishop

Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines

Assyrian Church of the East

How marvellous are these times that we joyfully celebrate the birth of Christ the saviour. With St Narsai the Harp of the Spirit a saint of the Assyrian Church of the East (399-502 AD), we praise the Lord and sing; “Come you earthly and heavenly ones, wonder and be astonished at the greatness of the step. By which our race has come to the great heights of the incomprehensible Godhead. Let heaven and earth, and all that is in them, confess with us, him who exalted our race, who has renewed our image and wiped our iniquity. And has called us by his Name, and has made all things subject to us. He is worthy of glory from all mouths. Who has lifted us up above all. Let us give praise to him forever and ever.”

May this day of celebrating the birth of Christ, bring harmony, peace and tranquillity to our troubled world.

May His peace reign on all corners of the world, especially among our brothers and sisters in the Middle East.

Blessing of Him, the only beloved Son of God be upon us all.

Metropolitan Mar Meelis Zaia AM, Archbishop

Assyrian Church of the East, Archdiocese of Australia, NZ and Lebanon

Chinese Methodist Church in Australia

Christmas is truly a season of joy as we remember and celebrate the birth of our wonderful Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He is the greatest and most precious blessing from our creator God to all humanity. The Bible tells us that the angel of the Lord appeared to some shepherds who were out in the field keeping watch over their flocks at night and said to them, **"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."**

Christmas is a joyous occasion because it was made for us; God made it happen for you and me. This "good news of great joy" the angel spoke of refers to the birth of Jesus Christ. He was born not merely for Mary and Joseph. Jesus came into the world not just for the Jews or the Samaritans; he came also for the Greeks, the Romans, and for all people through the generations. Jesus came for all humanity and he also came personally for you and me.

Christmas is an occasion to be cherished and celebrated because, out of His great love for us, God came to live among us and to save us. The angel said, **"A Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."** That a Saviour is born implies the need for the world to be saved and demonstrates the extent of God's love for us. It is not difficult to see how far the world has degenerated into sin and lawlessness. What has always been considered right by natural law is now considered wrong by the majority of people in our nation. Deceit and violence are rampant not just in the arenas of political, ethnic and ideological conflicts, they have become commonplace in our workplaces, our schools and even our homes.

More than ever, the world we live in needs a saviour. More than ever, the world needs to hear the good news that is for all the people - that the Saviour has been born to them; he is Jesus Christ the Lord. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."**

May we celebrate this Christmas with joy and thanksgiving by sharing this wonderful news with the community.

*Dr Albert Wong, Bishop
Chinese Methodist Church in Australia*

Churches of Christ in Australia

'...scattered the proud...lifted the lowly...brought down the powerful...lifted the lowly...filled the hungry...rich away empty... in remembrance of his mercy...' from Luke 1:52-54.

Mary's song points to a new reality. A reality that is initiated through the birth of Jesus. We celebrate this hope in the season of Advent and Christmas.

Mary's song is sung in stark contrast to the song of today. The song of our world seems to celebrate pride, power and affluence that triumphs over the marginalised, weak and poor.

The values of God's Kingdom in Jesus are compassion, justice and mercy. These are values that have both personal and communal impact. Personally, the gift of Jesus experienced in forgiveness, healing and hope leads to our lives being transformed. These same outcomes, when expressed in community, can lead us to a new world.

Imagine such a world: Indigenous Australians with full employment, with health, housing and just outcomes; Asylum seekers being embraced and welcomed; Abuse survivors experiencing justice, and feeling safe and whole; a political system that sees its deepest accountability as being to the poor and marginalised; the environment protected and flourishing. A utopian dream or a real possibility? It is up to us as the gift of Christ is made real through us.

May this Advent and Christmas season birth transforming hope in us personally, and may this be lived out for the sake of our communities.

*Rev John Gilmore,
Churches of Christ in Australia*

The Congregational Federation of Australia and New Zealand

God gave the gift of Christ. Christians gave the gift of Christmas.

Look at the shopping centres, the work Christmas parties, the family gatherings. Think about countries which are not Christian but which still celebrate the joy and generosity of the season.

It's more than the customary interpretation that it is "the crass commercialism of Christmas". It's people's need to celebrate, to connect with each other, to pause from all the everyday stresses and concerns that build up and can become so overwhelming. All cultures and all religions have a place somewhere for celebration and always have had.

The message of Christmas taps into an even deeper need and one which we feel with great urgency in the current world of uncertainty and conflict. It is more than a pause in the yearly routine or a catching up with family and friends. It is an expression of hope for a profound peace and something better that will be sustained beyond the season, or as the angels said, "Peace on earth and goodwill to all people".

Gifts are for giving and the celebration of Christmas is a gift which Christianity has given to the world. With it comes all the good things of Christianity: the possibility of reconciliation, harmony, joy, fulfilment, a fresh start.

These are the blessings of Christmas. May we all be blessed.

*Dr Joe Goodall, Moderator
The Congregational Federation of Australia and New Zealand*

Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions

MESSAGE OF THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY 2018

As we celebrate the birth of our Lord God and saviour Jesus Christ we rejoice with the Angels and heavenly hosts who proclaimed:

I bring you good tidings of great joy will be to all people (Luke 2:10) .

The joy of the birth of Christ brought forth light into the world as St John says

“In him was life and the life was the light of the world”

Christ said ***I am the light of the world and his words are light : you word is lamp To my feet and a light unto my path*** (psalms 119:105)

Moreover we are encouraged to walk in the light (Ephesians 5:9)

We pray for all suffering persons particularly our farmers; may the light of Christ Shine upon them and their families.

May the light of Christ shine upon our Australian society and dispel all Darkness of sin evil and divisions.

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

Bishop Daniel

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

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

CHRISTMAS ENCYCLICAL 2018

“Christ is born, glorify Him!”

Thus we have been chanting for centuries every year in our Churches. But it seems that we have not yet sufficiently understood the kind of unprecedented truth of our Faith that we proclaim with this our triumphant song. If one morning we took to the streets and shouted “the world is on fire, wake up!”, surely we would cause a general alarm. Yet, on the contrary, the call “Christ is born” does not impress us any longer, nor does it surprise us. It is as if it is a wish that we say almost instinctively, like the greeting “good morning”. And it is as if it is about a dim mythological remembrance, not to say –even worse– that it is about a “conventional lie”!

And yet this message, which comes out of the depths of Orthodox worship and life, constitutes the most exciting message ever heard in the world. We will not be able to understand the theological validity and the world-saving significance of “Christ is born” if we think that here we are simply being informed of the birth of a certain God. In any case, even Antiquity had spoken about “theogonies” and “theophanies” more than sufficiently.

The key to understanding the amazing truth of “Christ is born” is found not so much in the announcement of the birth, as it is in the manner in which this announcement was formulated. It does not tell us that “Christ was born”, nor that “Christ will be born”.

It tells us that “Christ is born”. What is the meaning of this strange present tense? It simply means that Christ, “the Son of the Living God”, is not a past event that is gone, nor a future that is unattainable.

God is “present everywhere and fills all things”. God is present here and today, in the every here and in the every day. From the moment that God became man, in the face of every person we can see the God-Man. Because if God was united with human nature “without confusion” in order to preclude every idolatry, yet he was united “without division” precluding every abomination.

St. Maximus the Confessor assures us that the Logos of God “takes flesh” continually within History and in every human person. The kind of concrete and visible form it will take in our corruptible body depends on how much space we will offer Him. Did not the Apostle Paul teach the same truth, in a more dramatic tone when he said; **“For I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body”** (Gal. 6:17)?

On the one hand, therefore, the verse “Christ is born” constitutes God’s unceasing present in the world of perpetual flow and instability. On the other hand, it indicates the unique stability and divine aspect of the world, which is the theandric character by grace within flowing History. In these two “roots” of the divine plan, we are called as faithful to live with a sense of responsibility and gratitude the unceasing present of God and the passing present of man.

These are the two basic sentiments – responsibility and gratitude – that must direct our life, knowing that nothing takes place in History in the absence of God, but also nothing is done in the absence of the human person. When the boundaries of our own limited present remain open before the benevolent radiance of God’s presence everywhere, then they are no longer boundary marks on which our own personal time is exhausted. They change into definitions of divine Grace which transform the end of the human person into consummation, and our definitive farewell into a Eucharistic doxology.

Therefore, with a renewed sense of optimism let us look again at the world with love and trust, with patience and tolerance, with affection and enthusiasm. The moving power behind all this shall always be the assurance that “a young child was born for us, the pre-eternal God”.

To Him be the glory and the power unto the ages. Amen!

*Archbishop Stylianos
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia*

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 an uncertain future.

May we be bearers of peace and goodwill to others at Christmas and every day of the year ahead.

*Jo Jordan, Presiding Clerk,
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia*

The Salvation Army

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.

*Commissioner Floyd Tidd, Territorial Commander
The Salvation Army, Australia*

Uniting Church in Australia

LIBERATING HOPE

The Christmas story speaks to our deep longings as human beings for love beyond measure, peace, liberation and hope.

At Christmas, we celebrate that God is encountered in a person, a baby, Jesus. And the baby is not the end of the story. Jesus grows to become God’s embodied message of love – love that knows no bounds.

Through his life and teaching, Jesus, shows that God’s love overcomes the boundaries that divide us. Those barriers that are created through fear of the other, barriers created through our own lack of self-worth, through social class, economic status, age, gender, or political alliance.

Jesus’ call to love as God loves continues today to transform whole communities, as people draw courage to love their enemies, to overcome their differences and to work for peace and reconciliation.

Christian communities and organisations around the world today are working to address poverty, injustice and inequality, motivated by Jesus’ way of compassion.

The Christmas message is as powerful today as it was 2000 years ago. It speaks of light shining in the darkness, love winning out over fear, hope overcoming despair.

This Christmas, I pray that you and your communities will be blessed by the message of Christmas that crosses time and culture, to invite us into an encounter with Christ, who calls us into relationships of reconciliation and peace that liberate hope for the whole world.

*Dr Deidre Palmer, President
Uniting Church in Australia Assembly*

Australian Baptist Ministries

THE NOISE OF CHRISTMAS

The reverberating Christmas songs in crowded shopping centres. The chattering of people and the noise of their cars viewing Christmas lights on houses in our congested local streets. Carol singers on street corners. Carols by candlelight events on national television and in parks and reserves around the nation. The rowdy exuberance of workplace Christmas functions and the mixed emotions displayed at the end of school year activities.

This busy noise is almost enough to silence the other Christmas story.

There is a whisper of another story that lives beyond a few days of festivities. An old story that points to a hope that does not dissipate once the party is over. A story that is not dependent on goodwill and warm greetings that evaporate as the normal routines of life return. A story that offers the possibility of new beginnings.

A simple story about a young woman and her unexpected pregnancy. The birth in an unrefined stable of Jesus, Immanuel which means God with us. You can hear whispers of it in nativity scenes in shop windows or the voices of the singers heralding a holy night or the pithy statement that Jesus is the reason for the season.

As Will Small says in his prose at www.otherstory.com.au, there might appear to be two stories but really there is only one Christmas story. If we have ears to hear it then that simple birth story breaks into our own. The wonder, the awe, the baby, now intersecting with our story in our houses, work places, our worlds. Calling us to hear afresh the story of the magnificence of God's glory in Jesus invading our ordinary world promising restoration, hope and purpose.

This is the Christmas story of God's gracious gift that opens the way to new a perspective with eternal consequences helping to make sense of our daily lives. You can read the story again in the Bible in chapter 2 of Luke's Gospel.

*Rev Keith Jobberns, National Ministries Director
Australian Baptist Ministries*
