



Christmas Message 2020

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When Saint Matthew's Gospel tries to sum up the mystery of Christmas the author makes mention of the name "Emmanuel" which, he says, means "God is with us". The Chosen People of Israel had always believed that God was with them and that God spoke to them especially through the prophets. When Saint Matthew speaks about God's presence, however, he takes an extraordinary leap, as do all the writers of the New Testament. God is no longer with us simply through his prophets or through signs and symbols like cloud and fire. With the birth of Jesus God is with us through his Son, the Word made flesh, who has come among us and remains with us as one of us so that in him we can see the face of God, and hear the words of God, and touch the presence of God. This is the amazing claim of our faith: it is what makes our Christian faith unique among the religions of the world. As Saint John's Gospel puts it, "God loved the world so much that he gave us his only Son". In Jesus, God is no longer only the impenetrable mystery at the heart of creation: in Jesus, God is revealed also to be our brother, our friend, our Shepherd and the one who loves us with a love impossible for us to grasp.

In this year, which has been so marked by the experience of the COVID 19 pandemic, many of us may have not found it easy, and perhaps still struggle, to discover the presence of God in our lives. For a while, our churches were closed and many people were deprived of the chance to celebrate the Eucharist together and welcome the Lord into their lives through Holy Communion. The pressures of coping with lockdowns, with social distancing, with working from home and juggling childcare and home-schooling with work commitments have impacted significantly on the lives of many people, and perhaps have even pushed an awareness of God out of their consciousness. Even our preparations for Christmas, both from a family point of view and from a religious point of view, are somewhat complicated and uncertain. Will the cost of airfares prohibit many people from travelling interstate to be with their families? Will social distancing requirements mean that numbers will be restricted in our churches for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Masses? Will the financial pressures of 2020 mean that we cannot celebrate Christmas as we would normally like to?

Whatever Christmas looks like this year one thing remains constant. At the heart of Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Christ. As long as we remember this and focus on this, Christmas 2020 will be as significant and as joyful as it always is - and perhaps even more so because we might find ourselves less distracted by the superficial things of Christmas and more free to concentrate on the extraordinary love of God for us which Christmas reveals.



2000 years ago no one could have dreamt that God would be found in a newborn baby lying helplessly in a makeshift crib surrounded by poverty, uncertainty and danger. God is full of surprises and is often to be found in the most unlikely of places and situations. I hope we all find some time to sit quietly gazing at our Christmas crib at home or the Christmas crib in our church and reflect on the extraordinary wonder of God's love, tenderness and care for us. May that helpless baby lying in the manger prompt us to look for God even in the most unlikely places. God is waiting to be found somewhere along the journey of each day. My prayer for us all this Christmas is that the Lord will open our eyes to recognise him when he comes to us and open our hearts to welcome him with joy.

I wish you all a very happy and holy Christmas.

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