



2016 Christmas Message

Bishop Don Sproxton

Advent and Christmas mark the beginning of the new year in the Church's calendar. This means that we embark on the next phase of our journey of faith in life. Another new year always raises questions as we look forward to what the year will bring.

One hope I have, is that what the recently closed Year of Mercy has done for us, will bear lots more fruit in our Christian lives. The grace of God has been at work in many special ways. It has been obvious to me, that so many of the people of the Archdiocese have heard the call of the merciful Father to adopt His ways of looking at our brothers and sisters. Our consciousness of the plight of the poor and disadvantaged has been raised. I have heard of some great initiatives by parish communities and our agencies which have been inspired by their reflection on mercy. These are going to continue because people have committed to becoming the reflection of the Father's mercy.

The Year of Mercy enabled us to experience the grace of mercy. The most powerful has been through the reconciliation of the Sacrament of Penance. I am told that there has been a great increase in the number of penitents over the year. The personal experience of the mercy and love of the Father through this Sacrament of Healing has flowed out into our relationships with family and the others in our lives.

The fruits of the Year of Mercy will continue to be seen. A new year is the opening of a new time. Our journey of faith in life continues. The beautiful account of the birth of Jesus, especially at midnight Mass, refers to his journey. St Luke points out that the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, was imposed on them because of the census called by the powerful Roman emperor. Regardless of the cost or inconvenience, Joseph and the heavily pregnant Mary had to go to the town of David to register. No sophisticated computers and surveys to ease census taking! It had to be the taking of an arduous and dangerous journey, in which Jesus would be born. Our Saviour came to live among us through the faith of a couple considered by the world to be insignificant.

The birth was made more difficult as they could not find a place of rest. We can see that at the beginning of his life's journey, Jesus could not be accommodated or even contained in human structures or thinking. We notice, as well, that right from the beginning, there can be no rest. Jesus' journey goes on.

St Luke places Jesus with the outcasts, the poor and disadvantaged. It is little wonder that Jesus shows great understanding of and compassion for the poor. This most clearly reflects the way God looks into our eyes, and why He asks us to develop eyes of compassion as we look outward to others.

It is in the light of this story of Christmas and the experiences we have had in the Year of Mercy that I pray for us during the celebrations of Christ's birth. To a world that is becoming harder in heart and hostile to Faith, we are needed as witnesses to the kinder, tender and compassionate heart of the Father. The joy of our celebration of the coming among us of God can rekindle within us a desire to live more closely the values of the Kingdom of God.

I pray for special blessings of God on you and your families this Christmas as we celebrate His great love in moving towards us and entering our journeys.