



Easter Message 2021

**By the Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

I send you all my Easter greetings of peace, and my prayer that you are refreshed in faith and hope through the celebration of the Resurrection of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The Easter story is, indeed, the great message of hope for the world. It is the story of the immense love that God has for humanity and creation. It is in the yearly telling of that story that we can be moved to a renewed faith and commitment to God who never ceases to work in our lives, in our times.

Of course, the listening to the story while we join in the celebrations of Easter in our Christian communities is a special moment of grace and renewal, both personally and as a Church. And especially this year, Easter encourages us as we commence the assemblies of the Plenary Council in Australia, which will continue the renewal of the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit at the Second Vatican Council.

In a recent reunion with the Tantur pilgrims I accompanied to Jerusalem to celebrate Easter in 2017, we began speaking about one of the lecturers who helped us prepare for that Holy Week.

His name is Dr Yohanna Katanacho.

Yohanna is a Palestinian Israeli and is a Professor of Biblical Studies at the Nazareth Evangelical College, and lives and works as a pastor in the Baptist Church in Israel. He has been regularly invited to provide lectures on the scriptures at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute. He helps students to get behind the texts of the scripture, especially the Gospel of John. Being a Palestinian Christian in Israel is difficult as you do not fit neatly into the political landscape.

Among his experiences, the most searing for him personally was being detained by soldiers and fearing for his safety. Yohanna unpacked this experience for us in terms of what he learnt about himself and how fear, mistrust and hatred have disfigured humanity at home and abroad. He wondered: how can things change?

His prayerful reflection brought him to the realisation that Jesus alone can bring purification and freedom. He started with the story of the marriage feast of Cana.

As we know, Jesus changed a huge amount of water that had been collected for the rituals of purification. His action certainly relieved a tense situation for the couple and their family when a miracle produced abundant wine for their long celebrations. But Yohanna went deeper.



Jesus, by changing the water into wine, left little or no water for purification. John repeats through his Gospel that Jesus is now the means of our purification. He makes our relationship with the Father right again. Selfishness, pride and all that threatens life within are washed away by Jesus who submitted to the Father in humility and thereby defeated the power of evil.

At the heart of the Easter Vigil is the celebration of Baptism, where those who have been called go down into water with Christ, into an experience of death, and come up with Christ to new life. They become a “new creation”, clothed in Christ, no longer slaves to evil. The newly baptised are purified by Christ and have a new source of strength and power because they have welcomed Him into their lives.

For the Christians in Israel, Jesus is the key to personal purification each day and their source of strength and courage in witnessing their faith. Yohanna recalled as well the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding a donkey, in the midst of a crowd waving palms and branches and shouting, “Hosanna”. The crowd were in reality holding a clever demonstration against the Roman occupation of their land, and the 100,000 pilgrims in the city for Passover created an ideal opportunity for this.

The “Hosannas” were addressed to God and to the one among them they believed could overcome the Romans. Hosanna could be translated as “Save us, now!” It was a call to rebellion. Many in the crowd thought that Jesus might be the Chosen One of God to bring political change.

Things were very different in the plan of God.

Jesus later demonstrated that He is a servant to all when at the Last Supper He insisted that He wash the feet of the disciples, a task that a Jew would not perform himself, but would assign to a gentile slave. Furthermore, Jesus would be the seed that dies, then begins to grow and produces many seeds, unlike the palm that simply dies and remains dead. A community of love that sought to serve in love formed and grew after the Resurrection, not a kingdom of this world.

Yohanna realised that freedom within is possible when we allow the love of Christ to enter our hearts to replace hatred. This gave him the strength to engage with others from a new centre within of peace and respect.

Because Jesus is risen and advocates for us with the Father, the renewal of each person and the Church is possible. Our greatest story, Easter, offers hope to all.