

Jesus: The greatest gift of Christmas

Christmas message 2012

The Most Reverend Dr Philip Freier, Archbishop of Melbourne

A decade ago I drove the thousand kilometre trip from my home in Darwin to be in Tennant Creek for the Christmas Day service. People from that small isolated town and nearby cattle stations gathered to give thanks to God for the birth of Jesus.

Yet the authentic remembrance there of Christmas and the gladness for God's gift to us was as present and powerful as it is in the packed St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne. The context, music and experience are very different. But the central focus of celebration is the same, the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, and the promised one from God.

We can roll back the years much further and encounter another cultural context in ancient Bethlehem. The otherwise undistinguished couple, Joseph and Mary, seek a place of rest and shelter so that Mary can give birth. Whether for the Eastern sages or the humble shepherds, the focus of that first Christmas was the birth of Jesus Christ - joyful and thankful. There is no reason our celebration should be any different.

Christmas is firstly a spiritual appreciation of God's gift to us of his son, Jesus.

It is also a cultural observance and perhaps it is young children who best understand and experience the joy and wonder of Christmas. Their excitement and the joys of receiving and giving gifts are signs of the true meaning of Christmas.

So what is this joy, and how do we experience it?

Jesus tells us in the Gospel according to John. He says that if we abide in his love, and if we love each other as he loves us, we will know his joy and our joy will be complete (John 15:9-12).

We can glimpse something of this joy this Christmas, by giving to others gladly and generously and by celebrating and giving thanks for all the simple joys of our humanity – particularly our friendships and family relationships.

May we be mindful, too, of those for whom Christmas may be a sad or even desperate time – including the homeless, the lonely and bereaved, the mentally ill, those with terminal illnesses, and asylum seekers facing an uncertain future.

The brokenness of our world that sees the innocent suffer and the apparent victory of the strong over the weak should bring us back to this point of hope for our world: that God's love, so fully present in Jesus, is open for us all today and every day.

Why not make a space to hear this joyful news afresh this Christmas?

View the video message at:

www.melbourne.anglican.com.au/christmas