

CHRISTMAS DAY

Written by the Rt Rev'd Donald Kirk, Bishop of Riverina

In the preparation for Christmas our world is being flooded with Christmas songs and carols over the radio, on the TV, and even broadcast in the streets. With most of them there is reference to snow. Similarly, images of Christmas – whether they be of Jesus birth or of the jolly red man – also often include snow. Yet the experience of Christmas in Australia is vastly different. In 1996 Colin Buchanan wrote an Australian version of one of these songs, with the chorus:

*Oh, Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells
Jingle all the way
Christmas in Australia
On a Scorching summer's day
Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells
Christmas time is beaut
Oh what fun it is to ride
In a rusty Holden Ute!*

Perhaps this is a little more realistic for us than songs about snow. This year has been extraordinary with significant heatwave across the nation and such a drenching of rain on the east coast, particularly in Queensland, that flooding threatens peoples lives. If we think about the time when Jesus was born, we realise that the lives of people were threatened then too, not by heatwave or flood, but by political unrest and abuse of power.

Perhaps the reason why Christmas is such a popular time in the year is because it so perfectly contrasts with the worldly fears that so often surround us – heatwave, flood, wars in other parts of the world, the politics of our own nation – and gives us the message of light, hope and peace for all humanity born in a child called Jesus.

Luke's Gospel tells us:

“While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” [Luke 2.6-7]

Mary gives birth to Jesus in a place of abject poverty and yet it is a moment of incredible joy for her, for Joseph and for the Shepherds who visit the manger. We are told that after their visit:

“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” [Luke 2.20]

Jesus, the Son of God and Prince of Peace, was born into the world in a small village of little significance, laid in a manger in a stable, and welcomed into the world by the lowly shepherds who in that moment represented all of us. God overcomes power and fear with simple humility, and the Angels sang:

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!” [Luke 2.14]*

When we come to the Christmas celebration here, we come to remember that God has entered the human experience that is ours in the person of Jesus, the baby of Bethlehem, and brought new light in our darkness, new hope to our fears, new life to our hearts. This light, hope and life is renewed in us by the relationship we have with God in Christ who nourishes and strengthens us with his peace as we worship.

When we go from here to share Christmas, let us share that same relationship of light, hope and life with our family, loved ones, or whomever it is we share this day with.

In the words of two verses of another Australian Christmas Carol written by John Wheeler, ‘Christmas Bush for his adorning’, let us celebrate:

*Christ is born! The angels thunder
Thro’ the heavens their tale of wonder,
While we pick for His adorning,
Christmas bush this hallow’d morning.*

*Onward with triumphant chorus,
Following the road before us,
Singing thro’ the golden weather,
Gath’ring Christmas bush together.*