

All I want for Christmasâ?¦

By Archbishop Geoffrey Smith, Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia

â??What do you want for Christmas?â??, is a common question at this time of the year. The idea is that we give gifts that are appreciated by the recipients rather than something that will be left on a shelf, put in the bin, or re-gifted.

As we turn to the celebration of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem we canâ??t help but think of the context of his birth in the Middle East. I am sure we are all very conscious of the battles being fought between Hamas and Israel in the Gaza Strip. It seems to me to be impossible to celebrate Christmas this year without feeling the weight of the suffering of people in Israel and Gaza in the wake of the attack by Hamas against Israel and its people on October 7.

There are of course other terrible conflicts in the world. Places such as Sudan, Myanmar, Ethiopia and Ukraine, and we donâ??t forget the suffering there. But Christmas draws our attention to the Middle East and it is very difficult to celebrate Christmas knowing the hardships that people will be experiencing.

So back to the question, what do I want for Christmas? I think what Iâ??d love for Christmas is news that Hamas had put down its weapons, Israel had ceased its attacks on Hamas, all the hostages were

released, aid was flowing into Gaza, and plans to rebuild the it urgently were being made. News that these things were happening would be a fantastic Christmas present for the people of Israel and the people of Gaza and thatâ??s certainly what I will be praying for.

As we celebrate the birth of the Christ child in occupied Bethlehem, we will have the privilege of doing so in peace. As we enjoy our celebration letâ??s bear in mind the families in Israel grieving people who were killed on 7 October, those anxious for loved ones being held hostage, the people grieving loved ones killed in Gaza, and those in Gaza who now have no homes and very little food and water.

That reflection puts things into perspective and makes us very grateful for what we have. It also reminds us how fragile life is and how important it is for us to do all we can to bring peace and love to those around us.

I hope you have a good Christmas, full of the presence and love of God.

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