



## Christmas: a start, a hope, a promise

**A Christmas message from the Archbishop of Adelaide and Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, the Most Reverend Geoffrey Smith**

This year, my wife Lynn and I have put tinsel on the front gate of the bishop's house in Prospect. Tinsel is a very easy Christmas decoration. It sparkles in the sun, especially when there is a breeze. Many houses in our area have outside Christmas lights, so when the sun goes down, there is bright, coloured light everywhere.

Christmas, as we celebrate it in Australia, is a bit of a strange time. The more attachment to Christianity declines and, therefore, the more the foundation story of Christmas recedes from the collective Australian consciousness, the more we seem to try to celebrate.

Christmas decorations go up many weeks before December 25. Gifts and catering become more and more expensive. Expectations of something 'magic' happening in terms of fraught relationships are heightened. More effort seems to go into Christmas, and it has to bear more weight, but our community is less and less sure what it is we are trying to celebrate.

At times, our celebration of Christmas feels like we are trying to cover up some uncomfortable realities in our individual lives and in our society and world. We have this amazing contrast of billions of dollars being spent on Christmas in Australia, while significant numbers of our people don't have secure housing and are having to depend on charities to make ends meet.

Further afield, in many parts of the world, there will continue to be war and suffering on Christmas day. Chances are Hamas and Israel will still be trying to wipe each other out. Russia will be continuing to invade Ukraine. Warlords will be vying for control in Sudan and the military junta will be in power in

Myanmar, to mention a few.

What are we to make of all this dissonance?

The only way I can make sense of this is to make sure Christ is at the centre of Christmas. Jesus was born into a world of injustice, distress and violence. Despite the images on Christmas cards and some Christmas carols, all was not peace and light (nor snow) when Jesus was born. This is the reality that Jesus was born into. He didn't avoid it with some Teflon life, but waded into the thick of it to embrace and redeem it. That's the importance of what we call the incarnation. Not an avoidance of a messy situation but a participation in it, to redeem it.

We shouldn't shy away from realising the inconsistencies of our efforts at life—the contrasts between the way things are and the way we'd like them to be. That's what Jesus came into and shared. It is the fact that Jesus did that that gives me hope, a reason to celebrate Christmas, and a purpose for the future.

Despite our best and necessary efforts, the world is not going to be put to rights properly until Jesus comes again. But his first coming, which we celebrate at Christmas is a sign of something, a start, a hope, a promise. All is not lost. In fact, we are in the process of being found.

I hope that in Christmas you experience something of being found as a person. Loved as a person. With purpose as a person. As you give thanks for the birth of Jesus, who saves the world.

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