

A Christmas Reflection 2023



Christmas is often considered a relaxed holiday time, to be celebrated with colourful lights, Christmas trees, singing carols, and the sharing of gifts and meals with family and friends. This is not how it is depicted above. Instead the picture is a simple one of God having been born as a vulnerable baby, surrounded by his mother Mary, Joseph, two animals and straw on the ground.

Before the birth of Jesus, Mary, when heavily pregnant, had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. On her arrival, there was no room for her and Joseph at the inn, so they ended up in an animal shed. Mary was homeless, away from friends and family. She was with Joseph, but having a baby who was not his. They were two people for whom things did not go as planned, and their behaviour was even seen by some as morally questionable. Later, Mary, Joseph and the baby fled from King Herod to Egypt, a foreign place, for safety.

In our world today, many adults and children in Gaza are homeless, starving and trying to find a safe place to live as the war raging around them continues

to result in people being killed and buildings demolished. People in Ukraine are also suffering from a war, being invaded by Russia. Further, climate change is beginning to affect all the countries in our world, particularly the Pacific Islands where rising sea levels are reducing the amount of land people can live on. Although a decision was made at the recent United Nations climate summit to move away from fossil fuels, the change to renewable energy is slow and needs to be hastened.

In Australia, summer temperatures have risen making life difficult for some. Rents have also increased dramatically in many cities and towns causing more people than usual to be homeless. When we look at our personal lives, some of us may be suffering from the loss of a home and/or possessions, the loss of physical and mental health through ageing or sickness, or the loss of loved ones who have recently died. If we live alone, our vulnerability may be causing us anxiety, with acts of stealing and destruction taking place around us.

From this brief survey of people's daily lives, it would seem that at present the joyous message of Christmas is not a reality for many people, yet I believe it does exist underneath what may be an empty exterior of false happiness. I suggest that the Christmas message which we *can* celebrate at this time of the year, is the amazing and wonderful fact that God, out of a great love for us, has come to share our lives, not only the high moments, but particularly the low ones. God is not relating to us from a remote place but is beside us, holding us. God's Spirit is also deep within us, knowing and sharing our losses, homelessness, pain, grief, brokenness and vulnerability, whether we feel this presence of God or not.

God does not protect us from all the difficulties and hurts that confront us each day. We only need to look at the lives of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist and so many followers of Jesus to see that this is true. Rather, God came to be one of us, guiding and enabling us through our pain and suffering to grow in love and compassion for others, and so reveal God's love in the world. In response to God's love for us, we offer our deep thanks and love for God, knowing that God is truly with us always. God is indeed, Emmanuel.

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