



*Bishop's Office
5 Lyons Street South
Ballarat VIC 3350
P.O. Box 121
Ballarat VIC 3353
Phone: (03) 5337 7121
Fax: (03) 5332 1122
E-mail: bishopsoffice@ballarat.catholic.org.au*

Christmas Message 2021

Take Some Quiet Time

In these days leading up to Christmas, I am very pleased to have the chance to say hello. Over the past year, we have been restricted in our travel because of the pandemic. I have had to postpone a number of visits to parishes and schools around the diocese. So I am particularly glad to have the opportunity to send this greeting to all our communities by video.

The weeks before Christmas can be challenging in any year. Winding up the school term, going to end-of-year functions, doing Christmas shopping - the days can be quite busy. This year we have had the added complication of the pandemic, with Covid testing and isolating and lockdowns and school closures and learning and working from home and general disruption to plans. We still have to check in wherever we go and we need to follow the latest regulations if we want to travel interstate.

People generally have done very well in observing the pandemic precautions to help keep us all safe. However, the extra demands of the pandemic have been tiring. People might well feel weary and, if we are feeling weary, this busy time before Christmas will be even more challenging.

In the midst of all these challenges, I would like to encourage you to take some time out for quiet. If only for a few minutes, take a break from all the activity. Sit down. Take some deep breaths. Take some time to be still. This can help to calm our minds. Then we can see things more clearly. We can distinguish what is more important and what is less important. This helps us to focus on the more important things in life.

In the original Christmas story in the gospel of Luke, we read of shepherds in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks during the night. They were not moving the sheep to new pastures. They were not shearing the sheep. They were simply watching and it was in that time of simply watching that the messenger of God came to them, an angel of the Lord appeared and the glory of the Lord shone round them and they heard the good news that a Saviour had been born.

During these weeks before Christmas, I hope we can all take some time to be like those shepherds, spending a while simply watching, taking a break from our many activities and simply sitting quietly. And as we sit quietly, may we hear again in our hearts the good news that a Saviour has been born for us, Christ, the Lord.

I wish you all a merry Christmas. May the peace of Christ be with you. May the joy of the Saviour be your strength. May God bless you all.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR