



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

## **Bishop Paul's Christmas Message 2023**

In these days leading up to Christmas, I am pleased to have the chance to say hullo and offer you my best wishes as we prepare for the feast. I wish you peace and joy as we celebrate the birth of Christ. Yet, even as I say this, I realise that, for a lot of people around the world, peace and joy seem far away. In many places, there is little peace or joy. Rather, there is war and sorrow. There is conflict in the Holy Land. There are ongoing battles in Ukraine. These are two of the many wars that are bringing destruction and sorrow around the world.

Soon we will be celebrating Christmas. We will read of the angel appearing to the shepherds announcing the birth of the Saviour. We will hear that a whole host of angels then joined in singing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace." (Luke 2:8-14) The birth of Christ was a cause of great rejoicing. His birth prompted praise of God in heaven. His birth also promised peace to people on earth. Jesus came offering the gift of peace. Unfortunately, people did not always accept this gift. This brought sadness to the heart of Christ.

In the gospel of Luke we read of Jesus weeping because people were not accepting the gift of peace that he offered. In chapter 2 of his gospel, St Luke writes of the joy at Christ's birth. But then, in chapter 19, he writes of Christ's sorrow as he looked over the city of Jerusalem. "As Jesus drew near Jerusalem and came in sight of the city he shed tears over it and said, 'If you in your turn had only understood on this day the message of peace! But, alas, it is hidden from your eyes!'"

We might find a particular sadness in those verses at the moment as we think of the situation in Jerusalem and the Holy Land at the present time. In Jerusalem there is great tension. In the Holy Land there is much suffering. As Jesus wept over Jerusalem long ago, we might well weep over the Holy Land today.

Yet, it is important not to lose hope. It is important to continue to pray and work for peace. For this, we have the example of Jesus himself. Jesus was deeply saddened when people did not accept his gift of peace. Yet, he continued to offer the gift. After he rose from the dead, his first words to his disciples were, "Peace be with you."

As we move towards Christmas, I pray the same for you. Peace be with you. Even as we hear of wars around the world, I pray that you might be blessed with peace. I pray that our world might be blessed with peace.

We reflect in sorrow on the suffering in the Holy Land and Ukraine and many other places. Yet, we can continue to pray that conflicts might be ended and sorrow might turn to joy.

May this Christmas bring peace and joy to you and your family. May this Christmas bring some peace and joy to our world. Merry Christmas, one and all. God bless us, everyone.

Bishop Paul Bird CSSR