

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). On this Blessed Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, I extend my warmest wishes for a blessed and joyful Christmas to everyone. May you have the spirit of Christmas which is peace, the gladness of Christmas which is hope, and the heart of Christmas which is love.

It is the Good News of love, peace, charity, hope, happiness, and above all, it is the Good news of salvation. The call of the prophet today is a call to celebrate Emmanuel, God with us.

Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ- the moment God’s love was poured into our world. This year, we gather with hearts that may feel heavy. We carry the memory of the tragedy at Bondi Beach and the anxieties of a fragmented world. Yet, the message of Christmas remains unchanged: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

**Finding God in the Humble Places:** Jesus was not born in a palace, but in a simple manger. This humble beginning is a reflection of God’s heart. He does not remain distant or untouchable; He meets us in the “messiness of life. God is with us in our low points and our quiet moments of grief. He is ‘Emmanuel’- God with us.

**A call to Unity and Friendship:** The angels first appeared to shepherds – the marginalized of their time. Pope Leo XIV, in his first Christmas address, challenged us to build a “communion of brothers and sisters”. He warned against the “forces of division” and the “rigidity” that keeps us apart.

**The Gift of Peace:** Pope Leo’s first words to the world were, “Peace be with you”. This is the gift we pray for today- not just the absence of war, but a deep peace in our hearts and homes. “God is near to lowliness; he loves the lost, the neglected, the excluded, the weak and broken”. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer) Christmas is the ultimate “exodus” of God coming to meet us. It is a reminder that no one is beyond His reach, and no wound is too deep for His grace to heal.

**Responding with Joy:** The shepherds didn't just hear the news; they acted. They went, they saw, and they shared. As we conclude this Advent journey – having stayed awake, prepared, rejoiced, and beheld – let us now become the message. Let our response be one of worship expressed through concrete gestures of love. Let us be a “missionary” people, reaching out to those who feel forgotten and afraid. Therefore, we, who are have waited faithfully, patiently, and vigilantly during the Advent season, must raise our voices and shout for joy because the Lord our God is now with us. Today, the prophet’s call is to celebrate Emmanuel, God, with us. It is call to be joyful.

May this Christmas bring the blessing of peace to your families. As we look to the New Year, may we move forward with the courage of the shepherds and the hope of the Gospel. Merry Christmas to one and all. God bless our community, our families and God bless Australia.