

2025 Christmas Homily

Fr Justin Driscoll

A newborn baby, fragile and vulnerable, full of promise and new life seems more appropriate than ever this Christmas. Recent events in Bondi have heightened our awareness of our own vulnerability, both personally and as a community. We're conscious of how fragile our cohesion is and of the growing tensions and polarisations that exist amongst us.

Some years ago, Pope Benedict, reflecting on the nativity scene said that "*God is manifested in that baby as love; God came unarmed, without force, not intending to conquer from the outside, but intended instead to be freely welcomed by us*" and to win people over with love and lead them to new life, he said. "*God became a defenseless child...the Nativity is God's gentle answer to violence.*"

This year our new Pope Leo, in blessing what is called the Living Nativity that makes its way through the streets of Rome in the weeks leading up to Christmas said that "*The Nativity is a gift of light for our world in need of hope*" ¹emphasizing the Nativity scene's power to bring hope, peace, and a spiritual journey of humility, that reminds us that we are never alone in God's salvation story. Pope Leo urges us to keep the tradition alive as beacons of hope for a world needing light and comfort, especially in these times.

What we celebrate in the birth of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace is that the remembering of this event each year has to be able offer an alternative vision and way of being in the world, a vision that's built on the kingdom of God, God's dream for the flourishing of humanity and all of creation.

Jonathon Sacks, formerly the chief Jewish Rabbi of London challenges what he claims is being done in God's name. He's especially disturbed by religiously inspired violence. And though not writing specifically for our context, he recognises that too often in the histories of religion:

- people have killed in the name of the God of life,
- waged war in the name of the God of peace,
- hated in the name of the God of love

¹ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-12/pope-to-living-nativity-participants-a-gift-of-light-for-world.html>

- and practised cruelty in the name of the God of compassion.

When this happens, he says, God speaks, sometimes in a still, small voice almost inaudible beneath the clamour of those claiming to speak on God's behalf – and what God says at such times is: *Not in My Name*.²

For us as followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, our service in the name of the God of life, the God of peace, the God of love, the God of compassion is expressed in the criteria set before us at the end of Matthew's Gospel in the Last Judgement scene

- I was hungry and you have me food
- I was thirsty and you gave me drink
- A stranger and you welcomed me
- Naked and you clothed me
- Sick and you visited me
- In prison and you came to see me.³

The three world religions that trace their origins to Abraham and Sarah, our ancestor in faith, include 2.3 billion Christians, 2 billion Muslims and 16 million Jews, have as their task to be a blessing to the world – but to invoke God to justify violence against the innocent is not an act of sanctity but of sacrilege. It's a kind of blasphemy – it's taking God's name in vain.

So perhaps for this Christmas we, '*the people who have seen a great light*,' as we recognise the fragile hold we have on peace and acknowledge our own vulnerability, walking together as Pilgrims of Hope, we might simply pray the Peace Prayer, often attributed to St Francis of Assisi –

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;

² Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (Penguin Random House: Canada, 2017), 3.

³ Matthew 25, 35 – 36.

where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.