



A Christmas Message from Bishop Shane Mackinlay (2023)

In early November, I was meant to be attending a conference in Jerusalem. Like so many other events and pilgrimages, it had to be rearranged following the brutal attack on Israel by Hamas fighters, and the subsequent military action by Israel in Gaza. Of course, the inconvenience for people like me is completely insignificant by comparison with the ongoing suffering and loss caused by the violence for those who are caught in it. Sadly, as is so often the case, those who are suffering most are civilians, including women, children and the elderly.

So, as our thoughts turn to Bethlehem again this Christmas, there is a great sense of sadness at the suffering of those who live in the land where Jesus lived, and at how difficult it is to imagine peace in the place where Jesus' birth was acclaimed by the angels as giving glory to God and bringing peace on earth.

As well as the Holy Land, there are many other places where violence and conflict continue this year: the people of Ukraine continue to bravely resist Russia's invasion, and armed conflict of one kind or another continues to inflict great suffering in places like Sudan, Myanmar and Colombia.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. At least part of why that is so important for us is because we are aware of how much we need peace, and of how difficult it is to find peace and to build it up. In our own families and communities, we all know of situations where division, hurt and mistrust have grown up, leading to animosity or even separation. So, when we come together at Christmas, we experience tension and disappointment alongside the joy and excitement of gathering together. More broadly, the failure of the Voice referendum this year has highlighted divisions in our national community, and perhaps even made them worse. We will only be able to build reconciliation and justice if we renew our commitment to ensuring that each person in our community is valued and respected, that their voice is heard, and that practical actions are taken to respond to the needs around us.

We are about to celebrate Jesus' birth, which is always an occasion of great joy and hope. We celebrate the faithful love of our God, who cares so much for us that he comes to enter fully into our lives, taking on our very flesh and blood. We celebrate the peace that he proclaimed and we acknowledge our need for God to build that peace in our hearts and in our world.

So, as we celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, we are also invited to recommit ourselves to carrying on his unfinished mission, remembering that the God who sent him amongst us also raised him from the dead, and continues to walk faithfully with us, asking us to shape our world ever more into one where his love and peace is known and celebrated, and where all people are recognised as his beloved sons and daughters.

I wish each of you and those you love the joy, peace, and hope of this Christmas season.

Most Rev. Shane Mackinlay
Bishop of Sandhurst