

'PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS' – HOMILY - 24TH DECEMBER 2017
4th Sunday Advent

CHRISTMAS CAN BE

Christmas can be a time of closeness, of reunion, happiness, stories and sharing.
For others it can be a time of separation, of loneliness, grieving and sadness.
Christmas can be a time of getting along, listening and respecting other's views.
For others it can be a time of being sullen and argumentative,
and wishing to be somewhere else.
And for some it can be a mixed experience.
Some long for Christmas, some don't.

We bring many expectations to Christmas.
Some we place on ourselves,
some our families and friends place on us,
and some society and culture place on us.

Some say Christmas is a time for children.

**OTHERS CAN SAY THAT IT IS A TIME WHEN WE CAN LIVE IN PEACE,
SO WHY CAN'T WE LIVE THAT WAY THROUGHOUT THE YEAR?**

AUSTRALIAN CHRISTMAS

The work parties before the Christmas break.
Going to the beach. Going to the movies. Going to the park.
Excuses to go shopping. Travelling, Holidays. Santa.
Music.
Time to catch up with family and friends.
Presents – small, mid-size and large.
Christmas Trees. Christmas Decorations. Christmas Cards.
Food. Many hours in preparing the food. Going out for a meal.
Watching Christmas specials and messages on social media.
Boxing Day Cricket Test.
And the many multicultural traditions of Christmas from our many cultures.

Christmas in Cherbourg Aboriginal community,
and in Queensland country towns, regional cities and Brisbane,
on the Sunshine Coast or Gold Coast or Stradbroke Island
or camping somewhere quieter.

Christmas away because of work
or Christmas with relatives elsewhere.

Our own parish community with some around locally for Christmas,
and others interstate and overseas.
For some of our families from Syria and Iraq,
it is their first, and for some their second Christmas in Australia in safety.

BIRTH OF JESUS

But **Christmas is really about Jesus.**

WHEN IS THE LAST TIME WE WENT TO A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION, AND NEVER WISHED THE PERSON A HAPPY BIRTHDAY OR BEST WISHES?

We would think it strange that we go to someone's birthday party and ignore them, never find time for him or her, walk past that person at the door, and show no recognition, no gratitude for all that person has done for us.

HOW DO WE WELCOME JESUS THIS CHRISTMAS?

The time when we remember the Birthday of Jesus.

WELCOME AND ENCOUNTER

Our faith this Christmas is about Welcome and Encounter.

We welcome Jesus not only into our lives
but into our very ourselves.

HOW MUCH DEEPER AND INTIMATE DO I REALLY LOVE JESUS THIS CHRISTMAS? HOW IS MY CHRISTMAS TRULY WELCOMING JESUS? WHERE IS MY TIME FOR JESUS THIS CHRISTMAS?

Let reflect on Mary, nine months before the first Christmas.

It is in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

God has blessed Elizabeth and Zechariah.

Now God sends the angel Gabriel to Elizabeth's kinswoman, Mary.

Luke's Gospel in 1:26-28 says:

*"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God
to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,
to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph,
of the house of David.
The virgin's name was Mary.
And he came to her and said,
'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you'."*

We all know the rest of Luke's account.

Mary's listens and hears, she clarifies, she wonders, she welcomes,
and responds in Luke 1:38,

"Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

This welcome becomes a lifelong encounter with Jesus

as the baby in her womb,

as a child born into the world,

as a child growing up,

as a young man,

as the Messiah preaching and ministering and praying and healing,

as the Saviour suffering, and dying for us,

as the Risen Jesus.

What begins by welcoming God's Word announced by the angel Gabriel, becomes an incredible **encounter with God during her life and into eternity.**

The announcement by the angel Gabriel also informs Mary in Luke 1/36-37

"And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing is impossible to God."

Mary sets out on a journey to visit and support Elizabeth.
For her, family is important.

**HOW THIS CHRISTMAS, DO WE WELCOME JESUS AND OTHERS?
ARE WE PREPARED TO JOURNEY WITH JESUS AND OUR NEIGHBOUR IN THE ENCOUNTER?**

AN EXAMPLE FROM POPE FRANCIS

Pope Francis recently released a video on Global Trends from his Migrants and Refugees team.

The video goes back over many generations of human history and its responses.

And particular years are flashed upon the screen.

And then Pope Francis speaks of the encounters with refugees and strangers.

He highlights important aspects of encounter.

It is available at <https://youtu.be/DSe56EqRCEI>

To our parish community
and to those who share our social media wherever you live.
May we welcome Jesus deeper into our lives.

Wishing you an intimate and loving encounter with Jesus this Christmas.

Fr Gerry

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – Preparing for Christmas - 24 December 2017]

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122417.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook24122017>]