



CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2022

Warmest Christmas greetings from the beautiful Church of St Jarlath, Yarragon, where people have gathered to pray for over 120 years and to celebrate the birth of Jesus!

I think of all of you and your loved ones as you gather to celebrate Christmas this year. I picture the many beautiful churches across the Diocese of Sale, where you will gather to remember the birth of Jesus. Some of you may be at home, or in aged-care; wherever you are, I send my greetings to you.

Our hearts are filled with awe as we contemplate the birth of this fragile baby. God chose to come among us sharing our humanity. In the poverty of the manger of Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph present their child to the shepherds who search for him, and they hold him out to us to cradle too: *Come let us adore him!*

As we reflect upon this year, we remember the thousands of people whose lives have been so affected by the devastating floods. Many will not be in their own homes this Christmas and have lost so much. We are inspired by the witness of so many generous people who went to rescue those in need, to provide shelter to the homeless, to feed the hungry, offer them clothes and who continue to accompany people with such empathy. Seeing communities supporting one another, reminds us of the goodness which truly exists and surrounds us – we see people at their very best in times of crisis.

There are many others across the world whose lives are currently beset by poverty, the turmoil and the violence of a war they did not choose: The loss of so many innocent people are tragic as are the horrors which have been inflicted upon them. We pray for the work of nations to seek peace, and the many agencies which offer solace and comfort. We might think of how we can support Caritas Australia, Catholic Mission and other agencies who can really assist people in crisis.

For some of you, there will be an empty chair as you gather for Christmas. May you share your memories of your loved one with the hope of the promise of the child of Bethlehem.

Wherever we are this Christmas, and however we are this Christmas, God meets us, holds us, carries us. He is born for us – Emmanuel – God with US. All we need to do is to open the wrapping of our hearts to receive the greatest gift of all, Jesus born for us that we might live.

I wish you every peace, joy and blessing for Christmas and for 2023!

+Greg Bennet
December 2022