



THE ARCHBISHOP OF BRISBANE

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2019

In Australia and around the world there is an air of uncertainty and anxiety as we move to the end of this year. The preference for death over life in many forms; political instability and the travails of democracy; the rise of populist and nationalist ideologies which build walls not bridges; the inhuman treatment of migrants and refugees at a time of vast movement of peoples around the globe; the lack of will to move on climate change which brings droughts and fires here but floods elsewhere. All this and more shows how shadowed the planet is at this time.

Christmas always takes us into the shadows. It is for “those who live in darkness and the shadow of death” (Luke 1:79). It takes us there because Christmas knows the truth spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone” (9:14). Only at the heart of darkness is the light born, the light of the child which “the darkness has not overcome” (John 1:5). That is why Easter is the key to Christmas.

In Europe the feast of Christ’s birth replaced the pagan celebration of the *sol invictus*, the unconquered sun. At the winter solstice, the pagan feast celebrated the triumph of light over darkness; and Christianity baptised the pagan celebration because, with the eye of faith, it saw the birth of Jesus as that kind of triumph, foreshadowing the victory of Easter.

To the newborn child, then, we bring not gold, frankincense or myrrh but the gifts of our faith and the hope to which it gives birth and the joy to which hope gives birth. The star leads us to the light, and at his feet we lay what we bring. The God who becomes one of us is delighted by our gifts and gives us forever the gift of the Word-made-flesh.

Archbishop of Brisbane
November 2019