

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE
CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY
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It's been a year like no other. A year of anxieties. A year of isolation. We've missed each other's faces, touch, proximity.

In dark times, celebrating Christmas can seem out of place. But it was never easy. At the first Christmas a young woman was forced to give birth in a stable and her baby put in a feeding-trough. Then the family fled for their lives.

In such dark times Christ's first coming was experienced as *Light*. Amidst such danger he was named *Jesus* or "God saves". In isolation, they called him *Emmanuel*, "God with us".

Many just want to put this year behind them. But we mustn't block out the questions it has posed about what matters most to us or the lessons we've learnt about human vulnerability and interconnectedness.

This Christmas – let's take a few moments to reflect upon what we've learnt through the Year of COVID.

Thanks be to God, our leaders, frontline workers and neighbours, we were kept safe. The cooperation is a tribute to how much we value life, and especially the elderly.

This Christmas – let's give thanks that we were spared the worst of the pandemic and pray for those less fortunate.

How will we be different when it's all over? Will we spend more time with our loved ones, treasure our work colleagues, school mates and neighbours going forward, be there for each other?

This Christmas – let's commit ourselves to being a force for bringing people together and eliminating all but necessary distancing.

Amidst our hardships, the Babe of Bethlehem reaches out from his crib. He is happiness and hope for every human heart. And his smile is for you.