



CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

BISHOP GREG BENNET, DIOCESE OF SALE

Warmest blessings and greetings as we gather to celebrate Christmas 2021!

One of my priest friends wishes his parishioners each year a, “very messy Christmas”. He does so not to wish them an unhappy Christmas, but as a reminder to be realistic about Christmas. Because it can be “messy” - as it was from the beginning of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke the evangelists contain the infancy narratives of the birth of Jesus. Over the years, these stories become so familiar to us: Mary and Joseph on their journey to Bethlehem, away from home and unable to find a place to rest, give birth to their child, the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, the Wonder Counsellor. The reality lived experience of “mess” is where God meets us in his son, Jesus, Emmanuel – God with Us.

As we gather for Christmas this year we are mindful of the journey we have had throughout 2021 – and it has been pretty “messy”. We think of the COVID experiences of families and others this year: people working at home; parents assisting their children to learn remotely and all that has gone on throughout this long time. We think of the aged and vulnerable, the sick and dying and those who felt alone, dislocated and disconnected. We think of those families and businesses who have been under so much stress, some in fact have lost their livelihoods. We are mindful of these people and their needs as we approach Christmas (the Christmas manger?). Alongside this, we are grateful for the gifts of goodness shared by so many.

Throughout the pandemic the parishes of the Diocese of Sale (clergy, religious and lay people) have continued to find ways to connect, to pray and accompany their people. In this “messy” time we witnessed the love of Emmanuel. There have been times of grief and sadness, and lots of postponements of important celebrations. Thankfully we now begin to re-emerge from this time.

Christmas reminds us that we gather as a people of hope and promise. The children from our Catholic primary schools have produced some beautiful Christmas cards based on the theme on the visitation of the Magi who bring their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the infant King. The lives of the Magi were changed forever by daring to follow the star to find where Jesus lay. – And the same can be true for us – once we meet Jesus Christ and accept him, our lives are changed forever.

We remember at Christmas the gifts which we receive from the birth of Jesus: peace, hope, promise, mercy, compassion, and above all, the knowledge that Jesus accompanies us in every moment of our lives.

As you gather this year, hopefully with family and friends for the first time in a very long time, may you experience the God of Promise in the birth of Jesus. May you be blessed and enjoy the gifts of this time for God has sent his son, born among us and for us – God-with-us.

May you have a very blessed, holy and a “messy” Christmas!

Bishop Greg Bennet
Bishop of Sale



Image: Victoria Balder, Year 7, St Peter's College, Cranbourne