



CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2006 FROM THE ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP OF ADELAIDE

We come to Christmas...

We come to Christmas and once more this year the birthplace of Christ has been the scene of bloody conflict: suicide bombing and military reprisals.

We come to Christmas, with civilians and soldiers still dying in Iraq.

We come to Christmas, at the end of a year during which I was able to spend time in the Sudan, seeing the desperation of that country torn by a quarter of a century of war and poverty.

Many will see Christmas as an escape from such hard and sad things, focusing on the celebrations, the gathering of family, the sparkle in the eyes of children, the carols and candles, seeing Christmas as a few days of welcome, soft relief from harsh reality.

With its stories of stars and angels, shepherds and magi before the crib, there's an undeniable romance to this great festival of Christmas. It might be tempting, then, to treat the whole Christmas story as a romance of indulgent escape.

But Christmas is also about the hard and tragic.

Here is a family in one of the world's poor nations, forced onto the road because of a government decree. Was it Bethlehem then, or is it the West Bank today?

Here is a child born in a shed with the cattle. Was it Bethlehem then, or is it Afghanistan today?

Here is a child threatened as many are killed on a political whim. Was it Bethlehem then, or Rwanda or the Sudan in more recent times?

Here is a family of refugees fleeing for safety. Was it Israel and Egypt then, or a boat at Ashmore Reef off Australia today?

The Christmas story embraces all these things. It is a story that begins to make sense of believing when tragedy would seem to deny that believing.

Christmas brings us the Good News of a God who is not apart from the chaotic evolution of life on this planet, with its beauty and tragedy, but a God immersed, a God whose being is found in every joy and struggle of human existence.

In the Christmas story we find a God who is present in a parent's fear, the cries of birth and a child's vulnerability, a mother's heart-ache and a family's fragility. In this story I find a God who knows about the smell of poverty, the taste of betrayal and even the fear of death.

This is the Good News of Christmas. God is Emmanuel, the God who is with us in every aspect of human living!

+Jeffrey Driver

Archbishop of Adelaide

