



# Anglican Church of Australia

Primate: The Most Reverend Geoffrey Smith

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I think it's true to say I am a fairly well organised person. I don't like leaving things until the last minute, so last year I had my Christmas sermon well and truly finished by mid- December. Then on December 21st came a devastating bushfire in the Adelaide Hills, just 25 kilometres from the Adelaide CBD. I thought my original sermon was pretty good, but in the light of the fire I re-wrote my sermon on Christmas eve. Of course, I didn't realise it at the time but that was the beginning of a year of change and uncertainty. I, like many people this year, have had to re-write, re-plan, re-schedule, change, cancel, and postpone as I never have before. I am holding off this year's Christmas sermon because I just don't know what will happen in the next month, and I don't really want to have to start from scratch again.

My sense is Australians are really looking forward to Christmas this year. We are looking forward to some fun, some celebration, some rest, and some distraction. Maybe we are looking forward to the 'normal' traditions of Christmas at the end of a year that has been anything but normal.

I am looking forward to Christmas this year for those reasons too, but also because I need the Christmas reminder that in Jesus, God is with us. We might be conscious we are living in uncertain times, but the context of Jesus birth was full of uncertainty. Palestine was oppressed by the occupying Roman empire. Various parties within Judaism were jockeying for influence and enthusiastically trying to recruit people to their cause. Rather than a situation of peace and goodwill, Bethlehem at the time of the birth of Jesus was a place of hardship, confusion, and tension. Christmas card designs (and some Christmas carols) might give us the impression that all was peaceful and calm, but the reality was the opposite.

Into that situation of uncertainty and suffering came Jesus: God among us. Jesus didn't come to 'fix' the situation of the first century, nor distract people from it. Jesus came to point to some really important truths. Truths like: God had not abandoned his people or his promises to them and, God's vision for the future of the world - the reign of God, was moving to completion. Not only did Jesus point to these things, but his life death and resurrection was fundamental in their fulfilment; a fulfilment we continue to pray for and work towards.

Jesus' life began in a community marked by uncertainty, fear, change and suffering. God among us came not in a time of peace and prosperity but a time of difficulty. This year seems perfectly placed to welcome him again and be reminded that in Jesus God is with us. God has not abandoned this world but loves it deeply and is faithful to his promises.

In a time of uncertainty, God is one we can be certain of. That of course doesn't 'fix' COVID in the same way that it doesn't 'fix' any difficulty we are enduring. But God's love and faithfulness, exemplified in the events of Christmas, can help us to have hope and peace and even joy.

I wish you a Christmas celebration blessed by the presence of Christ.

**The Most Reverend Geoffrey Smith**

Archbishop of Adelaide and Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia