



Anglican Parish of Warracknabeal

Warracknabeal, Areegra, Minyip, Hopetoun, Brim

Christmas & Christmas 1 December 2023

On behalf of the clergy and Parish Council of the Anglican Parish of Warracknabeal we wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas and a fulfilling and fruitful 2024.

May the graciousness of God, and the gentleness of the Holy Spirit be born in your hearts and homes this Christmas Season as we welcome the divinity and humanity of Jesus in our lives once more.



Welcome to this Christmas Special Edition!

I hope that I find you and those you are choosing to spend Christmas with this year well and in good spirits. For me, Christmas is both a time for 'reality' and honesty and gratitude. A healthy mixture I find that keeps a man (or a woman if you are one) honest. I still have Brené Brown's quote from last Sunday ringing in my ears:

"Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy - the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light."

Put that in your Christmas Cracker and pull it! Is this one of the mysteries of the 'Manger' - grounding us in straw and dirt? Is this the profound gift of spending 'time with the shepherds' in their field this Christmas Season - facing the lions, wolves and darkness of our own nights and lives? What will we bring to the stable this year?

May the Peace of God dwell in you - and those you love this Christmas season.

Merry Christmas everyone! Rev James



Prayer in the Parish

In the Parish & Beyond:

- +Garry; Diocesan celebrations;
- For our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the Warracknabeal region;
- For those new to town; for those visiting friends and family; for ourselves;
- For the people of Ukraine; Haiti; Yemen; Syria; Lebanon; Egypt;
- For the people of the Israel & Palestine;
- For the people of Queensland; for others facing natural disaster and tragedy;
- For those who hunger for food; for those who thirst for water;
- For those hunger for peace; for those who thirst for justice; for those displaced from homes and homelands;
- For those who hunger for healing; for those who thirst for compassion; for those who hunger for companionship; for those who thirst for laughter;
- Pam Hewitt – for her family & friends;
- For the Emergency Food Centre;
- For all those less fortunate than ourselves;
- For generous and grateful hearts; for thoughtful and kind minds;

Years Mind: Kenneth Dempsey, Pearl Bibby

“Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.”

Service Times Christmas

Advent 4 – 24 December

10.30am – Areegra

Christmas Eve – 24 December

8.30pm - Refreshments

10.00pm – HC Warracknabeal

Christmas Day – 25 December

9.30am – HC Warracknabeal

Christmas 1 - New Years Eve – 31 December

10.30am Warracknabeal

Epiphany – 07 January 2024

9.30am – Warracknabeal

11.00am Areegra

Epiphany 2 – 14 January

9.30am – HC Warracknabeal

Epiphany 3 – 21 January

9.30am – MP Warracknabeal

Epiphany 4 – 28 January

9.30am – HC Warracknabeal

5.00pm Café Church

Remember, Christmas isn't about how big the tree is, or what's under it.

It is about who is around it.

Christmas Collect:

Good and gracious God, who gave us your Son, the Lord of the universe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, the Saviour of all lying in a manger: this Christmas Season draw us into the mystery of your love. Give us a place among the shepherds that we may find the one for whom we have waited, Jesus the Christ, the Messiah and our Lord. This we pray in the unity of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

CHRISTMAS TO-DO-LIST

- ~~BE~~ - buy presents
- wrap gifts SOMEONE IN A HUG
- send gifts PEACE
- ~~DONATE~~ - ~~shop for food~~



After the Three Wise Men left, the Three Wiser Women arrived.



Want to give a grain of wheat - to produce a harvest opportunity within our parish? Donations of grain - of any quantity can be made using the Church's NGR number:

NGR 12439740



"Don't you just love a grape juice at Christmas?"

TODAY'S READINGS

CHRISTMAS

First Reading: Isaiah 61:10-62:3

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

I delight greatly in the Lord ; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the soil makes the young plant come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Psalm: 97

Response: *The Lord has made known his salvation.*

1. Sing a new song to the Lord for he has worked wonders. His right hand and his holy arm have brought salvation. **(R)**

2. The Lord has made known his salvation; has shown his justice to the nations. He has remembered his truth and love for the house of Israel. **(R)**

3. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout to the Lord all the earth, ring out your joy. **(R)**

Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14

A reading from the book of Titus

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Gospel Acclamation:

Alleluia, **Alleluia!**

I proclaim to you good news of great joy: today a Saviour is born for us, Christ the Lord. **Alleluia!**

Gospel: Luke 2:1-40

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room

available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.' When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.' So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord:

"a pair of doves or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

This is the gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ



PRELUDE SERMON – Sarah-Jayne Holland

Over the last few weeks I have been reflecting on how privileged I am to participate and contribute to the lives of so many young people in our community. To watch them become their own person, find their way through navigating life's ups and downs and guide them to make educated choices. The things I enjoy the most though are when they make me stop and reflect on myself or make me question things that I take for granted as a grown up. (Now I use the term grown up loosely because you might've confused me as for a child if you'd seen the tantrum I threw yesterday when I couldn't get some baubles untangled).

I had one of those moments where I had to stop and think when a student asked me the other day "What is the purpose of the shepherds? Why are they in the Christmas story?"

I was a caught a little off guard...I don't think I had ever thought about why shepherds or why the Magi or the stark contrast between the two, perhaps representing the broad spectrum of humanity. So when cursing Rev James for coercing me to speaking to you tonight I thought why not bring you on a research journey with me.

Shepherds. What is the image this conjures up for you? It's Advent so surely the image of a young child with a tea towel held onto their head with a headband has to be high on the list, especially for those preparing their nativity play. I'm sure it's not the image of a western district farmer in their RM Williams, on the phone in their Toyota land cruiser, complaining about the decline in wool prices. Perhaps your modern day shepherd is Rev James, drumming with his students, making projects with the Boy's Shed boys, ministering to his parish. A modern day leader of God's people watching for enemies who might attack his flock, tending to the sick and wounded, searching for the lost ones.

But is your image of the shepherd a homeless, smelly man? Shepherds kept their sheep on the outskirts of town, they slept with their sheep to keep watch and protect them. There was limited opportunity to bathe. It wasn't just a job, it was a lifestyle. Their rigid commitment to their flocks meant they were marginalised by society of the day. They were neither revered or esteemed in anyway, they were considered unclean. They could not enter the temple. They were not even required to register for the census that Joseph and Mary had travelled to Bethlehem for. So why were they the first to be told of the Saviour's birth? Why were they the first to visit?

When I think about the times I recounted the nativity as a child, as a Sunday School teacher etc I think I just concluded that it was because the Shepherds were nearby. We hear in the reading Luke 2 verse 8 "...and there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night...". The Magi were not the first to receive the message, royalty were not the first, not the government officials, not Herod and not the pharisees but shepherds. God chose shepherds to receive the glorious announcement of the birth of Christ. God saw the significance in the role of shepherding. Did God tell them first to honour His promises of deliverance and a Messiah made to shepherds of the old testament such as Abraham, Moses and David?

Or was it because in their humility the shepherds were amazed that God chose them and they couldn't keep it to themselves. They spread the word of what they saw almost as fast as a teenager sends a snapchat of someone's unfortunate circumstance. These simple shepherds had no expensive gifts to bring to Jesus. Their gift was the praise and worship they could offer.

Sharing the news with the shepherds is a demonstration of God's love for everyone of us, no matter who we are. We can return that love by sharing the Good News of the Nativity Story. So in all this research I started to reflect some more. Am I sharing the message with others? I love Christmas. Tonight's Prelude event always brings me joy for the anticipation and waiting of Advent, But am I sharing the message of God's gift, of his promise of eternal life, his forgiveness but most of all his love? Do I do this everyday, all year around? My conclusion, my memo to myself is, I could do this more Don't overthink it. Don't talk yourself out of it, wondering what others will think. Be like the shepherds and proclaim the good news.

So Colby to answer your question, I'm still not sure if the Shepherds are part of the nativity story to link the old to the new testament and demonstrate the promises honoured or if it is about the common people being important to spread the news of God's wonder but I do know I can be a better shepherd going forward. PS. Please don't tell Rev James I enjoyed my research. He can keep his Sunday morning gig for awhile longer yet.

Dear Lord, today we rejoice with the shepherds in the Good News of Jesus' birth. Help us to set aside those traditions that have become commonplace and explore the amazement of Jesus' birth. Thank You for sending a Savior for us. I want to spend my life sharing this news. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

[I hoped you liked reading this. For those who couldn't make it on the night ... I thought you'd enjoy Serj's reflection. Regards, Rev.]

MEGA CHRISTMAS

WORD-SEARCH



C	a	M	b	W	R	A	P	P	I	N	G
A	H	A	G	C	D	E	R	F	G	H	I
R	J	R	N	K	L	M	E	N	O	C	P
O	Q	Y	I	N	N	R	S	H	E	E	P
L	S	T	K	S	U	V	E	J	W	N	E
S	X	Y	Z	H	T	A	N	E	B	S	A
C	D	E	F	E	G	M	T	S	H	U	C
J	O	S	E	P	H	I	A	U	J	S	E
K	N	L	M	H	N	O	P	S	L	Q	R
S	K	T	U	E	V	W	X	E	Y	H	Z
A	E	B	C	R	D	E	G	F	G	T	H
E	Y	I	J	D	K	N	L	G	L	E	M
C	N	O	P	S	A	V	I	O	U	R	Q
N	R	S	T	U	V	V	V	L	W	A	G
E	S	X	Y	Z	A	E	I	D	B	Z	N
S	W	A	R	T	S	C	D	D	E	A	I
N	A	F	G	W	I	S	E	M	E	N	V
I	T	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	L	O	I
C	H	I	L	D	C	P	Q	R	B	S	G
N	L	T	R	E	Y	A	R	P	A	U	S
A	I	V	W	H	X	Y	N	Z	T	A	K
R	N	S	T	A	R	B	C	D	S	D	N
F	G	E	F	D	O	R	E	H	L	G	A
H	I	J	K	L	J	O	Y	M	N	E	H
B	E	T	H	L	E	H	E	M	O	P	T

Christmas	Jesus	Saviour	Shepherds	Inn
Mary	Joseph	Bethlehem	Nazareth	Donkey
Census	Wisemen	Gold	Francinsence	Myrrh
Carols	Mother	Child	Swathling	Sheep
Straw	Star	Herod	Peace	Love
David	King	Stable	Angels	Joy
Present	Wrapping	Prayer	Candle	Thanksgiving

Bishop George Browning writes:

[\[Blog \(georgebrowning.com.au\)\]](http://georgebrowning.com.au)

Christmas 2023: Why is Peace so elusive?

(With apologies to Charles Dickens and a Christmas Carol)

Christmas is an idea, a very large idea, it is captured in stories that shape our imagination and in consequence – the way we live. Sadly, the original idea is proving too big for the reductionist world most of us inhabit. Yes, we live reduced lives. Why, because we primarily measure worth by what can be bought and sold, and by its usefulness to ourselves. Hence, for most, Christmas is a commercial experience, rather than a festival of life and its connectedness.

The American president, Calvin Coolidge, said: *Christmas is not a time or season but a state of mind.* Clearly most of the world has had something else on its mind in 2023, nothing to do with living the spirit of Christmas. 2023 can hardly go down in history as humanity at its best.

The original ‘idea’ embedded in Christmas is that the divine inhabits human space and living. **Christ was born.** Sacred is all around. We encounter angels unaware. We look in the face of another and are in awe of their spirit which enriches our own. We walk in the forest, climb a mountain, swim in the ocean, dig in the garden and know there is a connectedness we must embrace. We all have the capacity to encounter the human face of God if only we have the eyes to see and desire to know. Can we see differently?

Ebenezer Scrooge famously saw differently after he had encountered the ghosts of his deceased, equally miserable, business partner, Jacob Marley. Dickens, distressed with the direction society was taking, played with the story of Dives and Lazarus. Let us do the same, albeit in the context of 2023.

The ghost of Christmas past.

One hundred years ago the “Little Town of Bethlehem” experienced no walls and no separation. Boys and girls played happily in the streets, and shepherds cared for their flocks on the hills surrounding the town. The boys and girls were Jewish, Muslim, and Christian. They were Arabs and Semites. Their differences enriched one another. They honoured each other’s sacred places and traditions. Then from afar came an ‘idea’ of separation, of exclusivity, of particularity, that preferenced one over the other. This preferencing soon meant the ‘others’ were squeezed out. The others were Arabs, both Christian and Muslim. The newcomers, mainly from Europe, Russia and the US brought with them biases, prejudices, and wounds from their immediate and distant past, and inflicted them on the indigenous people of the land.

Unsurprisingly, the indigenous people, the Palestinians, were forced into an ‘idea’ they had not needed before - resistance. This idea caused them further grief, walls fenced them in, and foreign military controlled every aspect of their

lives. As they increasingly felt unable to breathe, resistance grew into violence and the idea became Hamas.

The newcomers, the illegal settlers, seek to wipe 'Hamas' from the face of the earth. They simply do not get it. The more Palestinians are crushed, the more the idea of violent resistance becomes inevitable. October 7 was contemptible, But the contemptible killing of thousands of Gazans is not crushing the idea known as 'Hamas', the 'Hamas' idea is now even more popular amongst Palestinians, the Israeli defence forces are cutting off its visible branches, while ensuring the roots grow stronger, wider, and more embittered. **Netanyahu says peace can only come when Hamas is crushed. The truth is: peace can only come when the reason for Hamas, - occupation - is no more.**

It is never too late to revisit the past and make it the present. When the walls disappear, respect and dignity is given and received, peace will once more be experienced for Muslim, for Jew and for Christian.

The Ghost of Christmas Present

The three Kings, or three Sages of Christmas are well known in every city, town, village and hamlet across Russia and Ukraine. This is the territory of Orthodox Christianity. Orthodox Christmas celebrates the coming of the Wise Men, the feast of Epiphany, January 6. It is also St Nicholas country where gifts are generously shared; red hats, sleighs, singing, and snow abound.

There were three very special gifts in the saddle bags of the original travellers to Bethlehem.

In reverse order, the first gift was myrrh. The gift indicated the Bethlehem baby would suffer greatly on behalf of others. In today's Russia and Ukraine, the suffering is not of this kind, it is largely self-inflicted. It need not be. Both sides have suffered unbearably. A way should have been found to safeguard Ukrainian identity and sovereignty, while recognising and valuing its Russian links.

We are all children of our past. The conflict was started by Russia. However, Russians are justified in remembering assaults on their territory from Europe – Napoleon and Hitler to name the most obvious. The West (NATO) has not done enough to recognise Russia's sense of threat. Because NATO sees itself as a defensive collaboration, it does not mean the other side sees it the same way,

The second gift was frankincense, indicating the divine nature of the Christ child. In his presence all divides are bridged: male and female, West and East, Russian and Ukrainian. But divides remain stubbornly embraced. Sadly, we live in a dangerous world of nationalism. National identities are competitive. Nationalism as distinct from patriotism will be the cause of most violence and conflict in the 21st century.

The third gift was gold. The Bethlehem recipient turned the idea of kingship or sovereignty on its head, from power and control to servanthood and hospitality. Zelensky, and Putin must give up ideas of military triumph and devote attention to a peaceful, free, and prosperous solution for battle-weary peoples.

The Ghost of Christmases to come.

Britain's favourite hymn is William Blake's *Jerusalem*. Aghast by the dirt and poverty of Britain's industrialisation, Blake pondered whether the feet of Jesus had ever traversed those green and pleasant lands. Industrialization made the few rich on the labours of the many: it forged national identities. Its benefits required cooperation beyond tribal rivalries. This cooperation was based on the rule of law.

Now, we might say that industrialisation has been too successful. Cooperation, necessary to safeguard peace, justice, and a sustainable planet urgently requires international cooperation, (not national ambition) enforceable by international law. So far there is little sign that rampant nationalism on the part of major and middle powers is going to permit such cooperation.

The birth of Jesus signals a new world order. Unless nations grasp there is only one world, one earth, and that we must all serve it rather than seek to control it, the future is bleak. And yet...and yet

*How silently, how silently
The wondrous Gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven
No ear may hear His coming
But in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive Him still
The dear Christ enters in. (O Little Town of Bethlehem)*

This
Christmas
end a quarrel.
Seek out a forgotten
friend. Dismiss suspicion,
and replace it with trust.
Write a love letter. Share some
treasure. Give a soft answer. Keep
a promise. Find the time. Forgo a grudge.
Forgive an enemy. Listen. Apologize if you
were wrong. Try to understand. Examine your
demands on others. Think first of someone else.
Be kind; be gentle. Appreciate. Laugh a little. Laugh a
little more. Express your gratitude. Gladden the heart of a
child. Welcome a stranger. Take pleasure in the beauty and the
wonder of Earth.
Speak your love.
Speak it again.
Speak it yet
Once again.