



A Christmas Message

FOR THE DIOCESE OF WILCANNIA-FORBES FROM
BISHOP COLUMBA MACBETH-GREEN OSPPE D.D

“She gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”

Luke 2:7

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

My 2018 Easter message earlier in the year focused on the theme of ‘Hope’, the hope that was given when Jesus rose from the dead to offer the hope of new life for all. As we now come to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas we are again reminded of that theme of ‘Hope’ which is our ultimate gift during this Holy Season. Our hope can sometimes be dampened and challenged by various issues we face in our own lives, our diocese, our Church and most of all in the world around us. When the Angel Gabriel came to Our Lady to announce her role in salvation history, she was faced with something that would not only cause her much joy but also much sorrow. She had to face the burden of ongoing persecution and trials as those around her did not believe that she was asked to be the Mother of the Lord. Yet, she persisted with the help of God, trusting in His divine love and providence with an attitude of hope. Saint Joseph also trusted in God, despite lacking in belief at the beginning, to take Mary as his betrothed and with her go down to Bethlehem, a journey that would change the course of history forever. Yet the trials did not end there, when arriving at Bethlehem we understand that there was no room for them at the inn, the hope of comfort for the arrival of a child was not in sight and they were forced to give birth to our Saviour in a stable, laying him in a manger. Yet despite a sense of hopelessness, in that poor and humble stable, hope was born, a hope that would last forever.

I understand that Christmas can also be a time where hope seems far away. The stresses and demands of the season brought by our consumer society can be a huge challenge that dampens the spirit. Additionally Christmas can be very hard for many who are lonely or for those who have experienced the loss of a loved one. When we suffer with such trials and hopelessness we are reminded that the Holy Family suffered greatly with trials and difficulties, yet that changed when hope was the gift from Bethlehem.

We are reminded too that poor, lonely and shepherds were the first to hear the call of the Angels to give 'Glory Hope was given as gift not only for a chosen race, people or nation but for everyone, especially for each one of us. Therefore my dear friends, let us not lose hope, rather let us look at Christmas as a time for embracing the gift of hope that was given to us in that poor and lowly stable on that first Christmas night.

Many in the Diocese have been 'knocked around' by the drought and for them it might be hard to find anything to be joyful or hopeful about this Christmas. I think it is in these times of difficulty that we need to open our hearts more deeply, to Jesus our Hope. Jesus came into this world, to teach, to suffer and to die because He loved us and wanted to establish a personal relationship with us. Jesus wants us to be truly happy with our lives based on his values of love and charity. Jesus promised to help us on our spiritual journey with his special spiritual gift of Grace. Grace is a sharing in the Divine life, it is a free gift, it is given through the Sacraments, it strengthens our spirit, it strengthens perseverance, and gives us an abiding relationship with God, now and for eternity, it is a source of Hope and Happiness. We have this gift of Grace because a child was born in Bethlehem!

May we entrust ourselves and our families to the loving care of the Christ Child and remember that Jesus will take care of us and be with us on our journey no matter what happens. My dear friends I also entrust the diocese and each one of you to the Motherly care of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As Mary held the Christ Child in her arms on that first Christmas in Bethlehem, may she also hold you in her arms each day. May we never lose hope, rather embrace each day by following the star to Bethlehem.

I wish you all the Peace and Love of God during this Holy Season, Merry Christmas and God Bless you all.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Columba M', written in a cursive style.

Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green OSPPE DD
Bishop of the Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes

“For there is a child born for us, a Son given to us and dominion is laid on his shoulders; and this is the name they give him: Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, and Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah 9:1-7