



Anglican Parish of Warracknabeal

Warracknabeal, Areegra, Minyip, Hopetoun, Brim

Christmas

24 & 29 December 2024

Sunday Services: 10.00pm Christmas Eve (8.30pm refreshments)
9.30am Christmas Day
9.30am Christmas 1 (29 Dec)



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 2025.

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 again.



Hello Everyone and Seasons greetings!

There is much to reflect upon in the texts accompanying our pew sheet - Biblical and otherwise. I have been reflecting recently on the reality of 'wonder'. It seems to be displaced so much by anxiety, dis-ease and discord - or maybe just the sheer busy-ness of the 'matters of consequence' in our own lives. I am intrigued as to whether 'wonder' leads to worship? For me, 'wonder' definitely leads to gratitude, and I have so much to be grateful for. Maybe 'wonder' can also lead to generosity, compassion, tolerance, adventure, prayer, worship, peace ... "a peace that passes all understanding." Merry Christmas!

Every blessing, Rev James

19 December 2024

A Christmas message from Bishop Garry

Dear friends,

Greetings from Ballarat for this happy season. I hope that this Christmas will bring unexpected joys and blessings, as well as the warm familiarity of family and friends.

I'm hoping for fresh oysters and ham and turkey on Christmas Day!

2025 has been a tricky year for me.

My dear Mum, Lorna, died peacefully at my home on Shrove Tuesday. She was being cared for by her friend Jill while I went to a meeting in Melbourne. After a simple tea of a pastie with sauce and a glass of her beloved Farmers Union Iced Coffee, Mum lay down and died. Although there were some tense times, Mum's five and a half years living with me were happy and I don't regret a minute of that time. I was very grateful for the support of many carers. Mum's Requiem at the Ballarat Cathedral was really beautiful and a couple of weeks later we held a thanksgiving service at St Peter's Glenelg, where Mum had worshipped for over 50 years. Her ashes were interred in the church garden after refreshments had finished. A wonderful, rich, varied and full life - thanks be to God.

Following Mum's death I was increasingly plagued with leg problems and by Anzac Day I went to St John of God hospital here in Ballarat with almost complete failure of my legs. After three months of seemingly endless tests the neurological team here and in Melbourne decided that I had a rare and difficult diabetic neuropathy affecting my lumbar nerves and therefore my ability to stand and walk. Nearly 5 months later I am still in the rehabilitation hospital having physiotherapy twice most days and other medical interventions. Just in the last few weeks I have been able to stand with a frame, to walk assisted with some confidence and to navigate with both a manual and a motorised wheelchair. The doctors are hopeful that I can go home sometime in mid January.

I have learned from this experience

- how to depend on others (a new experience for me)*
- patience (a virtue I have rarely exercised)*
- that the love and prayers of many people keep me alive*
- the many ambiguities of our medical system and medical personnel*
- that the Church and the Diocese can thrive without me being in charge*
- a deep gratitude for those who have persisted even in dark times.*

I reckon there might be a retirement book in this experience. We'll see!

I've watched a lot of TV news this year and it has been tough. Ukraine, Gaza, Israel and Lebanon and the Yemen have been places of real pain and tension. And now Syria has joined the list. It would be easiest to revert to simplistic name calling and "taking sides", but all human relationships are complex, even at an international level. Too often even the most respected journalists use simplistic analysis eg the

almost deliberate obfuscation of the difference between anti Zionist and antisemitic protests.

Of course, our Christian hope is that into all this mess, the call of Christmas for goodwill among people and peace on the earth might be heard anew. Our personal distresses and the international messes are not so different today than they were at the first Christmas.

I am grateful for your prayers and support. Cath Zala has been my primary carer, along with Jill Gale, Fr Chris Keast my Chaplain and Fr Mike O'Brien. The Vicar General has been a tower of support and will be consecrated to serve as an assistant bishop in Ballarat in February next year. Andy and De Wurm continue to love, cajole and support me from a distance and have visited for lengthy stays in Ballarat. Alice Knight reminds me of the realities of life and has provided Vietnamese pork meals - a good antidote to hospital food. My episcopal colleagues have been very supportive, especially Phillip and Joy Freier, Kate Prowd, Brian and Robyn Farran, Andrew and Jan Curnow, Jeremy Greaves and Kay Goldsworthy. I am always grateful for the diocesan leadership group.

May Christmas bring us all joy and peace, new energy and hope for the year ahead, and a deeper dependence on God's grace and mercy.

With love, Garry Weatherill.



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

Prayer in the Parish

In the Parish & Beyond:

- +Garry; for all our Diocesan sisters and brother in faith;
- For those experiencing trauma, loss and discontent at this time of year;
- For all whose lives are disrupted and changed due to Natural disaster – home and abroad;
- For all First Responders this Christmas and New Year Season;
- For the leaders of all Nations, those with influence to act for the Common Good;
- For those who hunger for food;
- For those who thirst for water;
- For those seeking refuge and asylum;
- For all who are grieving;
- For all known to us in hospital and Aged Care Facilities; for those known to us who are unwell;
- For God's 'JOY' in our hearts, our homes and our lives;
- For all the people of our region;
- For the work and mission of BCA & ABM;
- For those we love, near and far away;
- For God's light that dispels darkness; for God's life that dispels death and disease; for God's love that dispels fear;
- For our neighbours;
- For all who are travelling this Christmas Season; for all our families & friends.

Years Mind: For all who hold a place in our hearts; for all who have departed this earthly life this year;

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

Service Times Dec/Jan

Christmas

Christmas Eve – 24 December

8.30pm Refreshments
10.00pm Carols and HC

Christmas Day

9.30am Warracknabeal

Christmas 1 – 29 December

9.30am Warracknabeal

Epiphany

Epiphany – 05 January 2025

9.30am Warracknabeal
11.00am St Mark's Areegra

Baptism of Our Lord – 12 January 2025

9.30am Warracknabeal

Epiphany 3 – 19 January 2025

9.30am Warracknabeal

Epiphany 4 – 26 January 2025

9.30am Warracknabeal

TEARFUND Useful Gift Shop

For the gift that gives twice.

Contact Rev directly or via TEARFUND website: usefulgifts.org

for your alternative Christmas presents that help less advantaged around the world. Heaps of gifts to choose from!

See the poster in the church foyer!

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

It is about who is around it.

Donations of grain – of any quantity can be made using the Church's NGR number: NGR 12439740

TODAY'S READINGS

CHRISTMAS DAY

First Reading:

Isaiah 62:6-12

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth. The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: 'Never again will I give your grain as food for your enemies, and never again will foreigners drink the new wine for which you have toiled; but those who harvest it will eat it and praise the Lord, and those who gather the grapes will drink it in the courts of my sanctuary.' Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations. The Lord has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: 'Say to Daughter Zion, "See, your Saviour comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.'" They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord; and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Psalm:

97

Response: A light will shone on us this day; the Lord is born for us.

1. The Lord is king; let the earth rejoice: let the multitude of islands be glad. Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. **(R)**

2. Fire goes before him: and burns up his enemies on every side. His lightnings light the world: the earth sees it and quakes. **(R)**
3. The mountains melt like wax before his face: from before the face of the Lord of all the earth. The heavens have proclaimed his righteousness: and all peoples have seen his glory. **(R)**
4. They are ashamed, all those who serve idols and glory in mere nothings: all gods bow down before him. Zion heard and was glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoiced: because of your judgements, O God. **(R)**
5. For you, Lord, are most high over all the earth: you are exalted far above all gods. The Lord loves those that hate evil: the Lord guards the life of the faithful, and delivers them from the hand of the ungodly. **(R)**
6. Light dawns for the righteous: and joy for the true of heart. Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous: and give thanks to his holy name. **(R)**

Second Reading:

Titus 3:4-8A

A reading from the letter of Paul to Titus

But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having

been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia! Alleluia! A holy day has dawned upon us. Come, you nation, and adore the Lord. For today a great light has come upon the earth.
Alleluia!

Gospel:

Luke 2:8-20

A reading from the gospel according to Luke

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.

This is the gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

THE PROPERS

Sentence: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth.

Collect: Almighty God, who gave your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him and as at this time to be born of the virgin Mary: grant that we being born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the same Spirit, ever one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Peace on Earth

Luke begins the Christmas narrative by saying: *“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea and Herod was ruler of Galilee and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis and Lysanias ruler of Abilene during the priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas”* - a very specific context.

There is always a context. That is why this year we have seen Pope Francis praying in front of the Vatican crib with the baby Jesus wrapped in a keffiyeh, the easily distinguished Palestinian head dress. How can we not remember that Betlehem has been a besieged Palestinian town on the West Bank since 1967, flanked by walls, searchlights, checkpoints, occupation, and denial of economic life. Whatever encounter with the divine we may have experienced, or seek to experience, there is always a context. This year’s global context is one of great deprivation and violence for many and of obscene ambition for power and control by a few. Into this circumstance, despite this circumstance, love continues to pour.

As we prepare for this year’s celebration of incarnation – God with us, we cannot claim or expect divine company without, in mind and spirit, seeking to host the downtrodden, and calling out the misuse of power that is the cause of this suffering by the few. We cannot celebrate without reciprocating with love.

At home more people are living in economic precariousness.

In Sudan, Syria, Gaza, the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Ukraine, the situation for millions is much more serious than simply ‘precarious’. The reason for this dreadful situation is not some kind of disease or phenomenon of nature inflicted upon hapless humanity, but human recklessness, mindless ambition for domination and expansion exercised by those with weapons supplied by a global economy benefitting from others misery.

Truth, with which religion and science are in lockstep agreement, is that the universe is relational to its core. The Zionist philosophy is a denial of this truth. Israel has been built not on gracious relationships, but on exclusion. That is why violence will continue to accompany its existence until it breaks free from the political philosophy that is destroying its moral heart, as well as the physical existence of its Palestinian residents.

I love Christmas decorations, the tree, the music, the laughter and of course, the food! But the true gift and surprise of Christmas is what it reveals of the nature of God. And what a surprise it is. As Paul would later say: *“foolishness to Greeks and a stumbling block to Jews”*. God comes as a vulnerable baby. There is no pretentiousness or grandeur. More, this is not simply revelation about the nature of God, it is a revelation about the true nature of reality, including human reality. Peace cannot be found by winning a conflict, it is found in being at one, with oneself, with others, with the created order, and with God.

The problem is not simply that the world does not get it, but, so often, Christian life and teaching does not demonstrate it.

The God who embraces us as a vulnerable baby embraces us with the capacity to become fully human. 80 years of human life is very short in the scheme of things. We only have one shot at it. In this period, we are to discover what it means to be

fully human. History shows the more powerful or wealthy we become, the more likely we are to completely miss the mark.

Vulnerability is seen as weakness. Power is perceived as strength. During the past year, there have been too many examples of people condemned, even imprisoned, for giving humanity their best shot. Thousands of Palestinians have risked everything to protect children and the vulnerable, and to provide dignity to the dead and injured. For their trouble they are labelled terrorists. Zomi Frankcom gave her life for manning a kitchen. She gave being human her best shot. At home countless numbers have lost their employment for blowing the whistle on malpractice in their organisation. David McBride has been sent to gaol for 5 years for blowing the whistle on malpractices in the armed forces. Bernard Collaery could have faced a gaol sentence for blowing the whistle on the previous government's attempt to steal resources belonging to the Timorese people.

Becoming fully human is our only calling. Having been in a position of considerable authority for many years, on reflection I can see that holding that position was not the important matter, being a full human being notwithstanding that position, was the real calling. How, if at all, I managed to steer through a possible minefield of self-delusion, others will have to judge.

In the early years of my ministry, I participated in two weeklong missions in the company of the legendary Bishop Howell Witt. On about the fourth day, wishing to tackle the matter of life and its meaning, (standing on the front pew to give more leverage to his five foot five Welsh scrumhalf stature) he would declare: "God did not come to make you more religious, he did not come to make you more prosperous, he did not even come to make you more Christian, he came to make you more Human".

Next year we face the prospect of being globally led by leaders who appear to despise the nature of God, and the true nature of humanity revealed in the nativity. And yes, they are all males. Perhaps it has been ever thus.

That people can transcend their leadership is a reason for hope. Palestinian and Jewish people can and will reach above and beyond the walls that have been built to divide them. Australian citizens will fly Indigenous flags no longer recognised by prospective leaders. Christian, Jewish and Muslim men and women will celebrate together the God who belongs to none of them but serves all of them.

Crowds asked him: "what then shall we do".

In reply he said to them:

"Anyone who has two coats must share with those who have none
And whoever has food must do likewise. (Luke 3: 10 - 11)"

Geroge Browning: 16 Dec 2024 (Used with permission)