



2020 CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

You may need to be of my vintage or older to remember back to the days, or rather the nights, of Black and White Television, and that English satire *'Till Death Us Do Part* with Warren Mitchell (more usually a fine Shakespearian actor) playing that cranky little man Alf Garnett.

Well, in a Christmas episode Alf is telling his grand-daughter the *Nativity Story*, when she asked: *Grandad, why was there no room in the Inn?* (Lk 2/7)

To which Alf's long-suffering wife, ironing away in the corner, pipes up: *Well, dear, we all know how busy it is at Christmas time!*

At which Alf gives her one of his withering glares and utters: *Ah. cor blimey Else you silly old moo.*

Well what has that irreverent and tasteless piece of nostalgia to say to us for Christmas 2020?

Its Luke's Gospel which explains why there was no room in the inn on that first Christmas.

It was Census night: *the first*

Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole world. This census - the first - took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judaea, to David's town called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line,

(Scripture scholars however do struggle to reconcile what is known of the dates of these population counts and their required places of recording. (See John McKenzie: [Dictionary of the Bible, Census p125/6](#))

So that *First Christmas* year may have been every bit as disruptive for *the whole world* as this *Covid year* has been for everyone of us – but in the opposite way.

While we have all spent this year in varying degrees of *Covid Lockdown*, so, according to Luke, the whole Roman Empire was then *on the move* – each back to their own ancestral roots.

That Census upheaval, in the opposite degree, may have been even more chaotic than this *Covid Lockdown* year has been for all of us.

During this year I have made myself available for an hour each afternoon for conversation and/or Reconciliation – in the safe social-distancing setting of the spacious Bishop’s House in Cairns.

This has been a *graced experience* as we have reflected, in perhaps a more relaxed place and with a freer time-frame than usual, on just what these past strange months have meant for us all in various degrees of *Lockdown*.

It has been a time of imposed *soul-searching*.

These unusual, unprecedented months have put us in touch with what may be the best and the worst in our own lives and in our world.

This has been strangely a *God Given Time*, an extension of the very *Christ Event* which remarkably parallels, yet also contrasts with, the *Nativity Story* in all its own stressed aspects.

Yours truly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+ James Foley'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a cross at the beginning.

+ James Foley
BISHOP OF CAIRNS