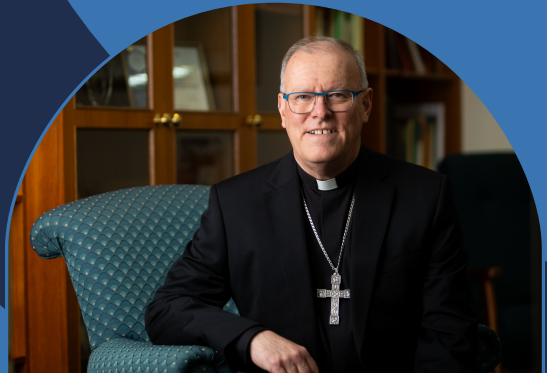


Christmas Message 2023



Bishop Ken Howell



GOD-WITH-US

The Christmas decorations in the shops have been up for weeks! The commercial side of Christmas is unavoidable, however it does help point us in the direction of the great feast that unites us all. While we look forward to the many associated activities of the festivities, we should never forget those who also dread something of this time of year. The realities of living can leave us with sorrow around this time as perhaps a loved one will no longer grace our table or a family member has distanced themselves from the unity we long for as families. The people of Tara and other regions have lost their homes and livelihoods through bushfires and other disasters. For all those who experience sadness this Christmas, we assure you of our prayers, but we also remind you of the essence of what we celebrate. i.e. God is with us!

Christmas, with all its ceremony and customs and family rituals, should always take us to the core of why Jesus was born into our midst. From the day of his birth, in the messiness of those circumstances, proclaim clearly that God is never distant from the bits and pieces of our everyday lives, with all their disarray. God-with-us is never just a mantra from a Christmas carol, it's the heart of our faith, our life and our hope. So, into whatever Christmas will be for us this year, we find the story of His birth touching all aspects of our lives. Thus, we are encouraged as we face the messy bits that make up our lives.

As your new bishop, I come to this my first Christmas in the Diocese of Toowoomba, adjusting to a new home and the wonderful responsibility of caring for you as your shepherd. Thank you for your warm and gracious welcome that I have experienced thus far. It has indeed been a rich blessing for me.

May your Christmas be richly blessed this year as we live within the joy of all that our faith offers us as we celebrate God-with-us.

Bishop Ken Howell

Bishop of Toowoomba

December 2023

PS This year, half of our Christmas Day collection across the Diocese will be donated to the relief of the victims of the bushfires at Tara. Thank you for your generosity.