

Welcome Home

Bishop Michael Kennedy

Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

Each Christmas we hear the angels' song to the shepherds: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill toward all." These words remind us of the night when heaven touched earth, when God took on human flesh and made His home among us.

The wonder of Christmas is that God chose to make His home on earth, entering our world in the person of Jesus. He entered our lives not as a distant ruler but as a child, born into the ordinary and the imperfect. In doing so, He showed us that every home, no matter how small, simple, or messy, can be a place where divine love dwells. The manger reminds us that God is never far away. He comes to where we are and makes even our simplest moments sacred.

Christmas reminds us that God's home is with His people, and that we are called to create that same sense of welcome in our own homes and communities.

This is what we celebrate as we gather: in a house, in a Church, around a table, in a heart that longs for belonging. For to belong is the deepest form of coming home. It is to be known, to be invited and to be embraced.

Home is where we don't have to pretend to hide our struggles, our past, or our fears. It is where we can breathe and bring our full selves: the joyful moments, the broken ones, the unanswered questions, the hopes we carry quietly in our heart.

In the birth of Christ, God says to each of us: You are loved. You belong. You are home. The birth of Jesus is God's way of saying to all humanity: Welcome home.

In recent years, the world has known what it is like when relationships fracture, when the place many once called home feels unsafe, distant or even unreachable. We have witnessed war and unrest, heard of communities torn apart and felt the uncertainty of a world that seems increasingly polarised and fragile. Sadly, we have recently witnessed this on our own shores at Bondi Beach and seen what harm and devastation can be caused when hatred rather than respect reigns in people's hearts. With heavy hearts we acknowledge the Australians who recently lost their lives to this senseless antisemitic violence at Bondi.

In our own lives, too, we may have faced seasons of change. We may have lost loved ones, received a devastating medical diagnosis, lost or changed jobs, moved house, or simply felt too far away from where we thought we should be.

Yet Christmas reminds us that the home we seek is first of all found in God's love. The infant Jesus, born into simplicity and vulnerability, speaks to every human heart: come, rest, remain in me, for you are beloved.

Whichever table you find yourself at this Christmas, you might set an extra place. To leave room for a visitor or stranger. To say: there is space for you here too. You are welcome. You belong.

As we light the candles, sing carols, share meals and laughter, let us remember: the glory of Christmas shines brightest in our welcome. In the way we open our doors and our hearts.

So to every family, every household and every single one of you: Welcome home. Welcome to the place where you are loved and accepted. Welcome to the embrace of Christ and his Church community.

May the place where you gather be one of hope. And may the peace of the newborn Saviour dwell with you now and always.

I wish you all a blessed and joyful Christmas.