

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

BISHOP EUGENE HURLEY

WE ARE ONCE again privileged to be approaching the great celebration of Christmas.

It doesn't seem to matter whether we are young or old, native born or from anywhere else, we all want to part of the joyful celebration of Christmas. It is often an exhausting time for families as they travel to be with family, or have family come and visit with them. Often it means travelling overseas to be part of the celebrations.

Gifts are chosen and exchanged; cards or emails of greeting are shared. [Sometimes with people we only have contact with on this one occasion in the year!]

The world seems to be a better and more joyful place as we celebrate this wonderful season of Christmas. We often wonder why it can't be like this all the time!!

Perhaps it is because we have forgotten what Christmas is, and why we celebrate it at all.

It seems sad when people stress that even though they like celebrating Christmas, they are in no way religious.

Some of my Aboriginal friends remind me that, 'When we forget the story, then we lose our identity. We don't understand who we are any more.'

Perhaps that is what's happening to us as a community, as we begin selling 'Christmas' cakes and decorations in late September. We advertise with such enthusiasm that people can be made to feel guilty if they don't give big and expensive presents to family and friends, even though they cannot afford them.

Sadly it seems that we have, as a community, *forgotten the story*...the historical fact that Jesus Christ came among us as a human being, as an act of indescribable love for us

and for the world. *This is the story* and this is what we are celebrating. We are celebrating a feast of extraordinary love. Part of the story is that we are asked, because of this celebration, to love one another in the same wonderful and generous way.

Recently I shared with a family the death of their young university student son, who was killed in tragic circumstances. During the eulogy, his father spoke with amazing courage and incredible love. He pointed out to all of us that 'life is about love...that's all there is, so tell people you love that you love them.'

Having spoken of the life of his son as a pilgrimage of love, describing him as a 'warrior of peace' he then addressed the incredibly difficult challenge of forgiving those who caused his son's death.

He said, 'Whilst forgiveness will not alter the past for us, it will influence the future for our family.'

Apart from being inspired by the courage and the goodness of this father and his family, it reminded me of why we celebrate Christmas....the birth of the Prince of Peace and Lover of the world. This man was living the story; he knows and loves Jesus Christ whose birth day we celebrate again this CHRISTmas.

He may not be hurrying out to purchase presents for his family and friends just because they have been advertised for months. That is a different story, which has, in large part, forgotten its roots.

His message during that inspiring eulogy, is *the real story* and the real reason we celebrate this wonderful event of CHRISTmas and the very best gift he could have given to all of us who had the privilege of being present. He is living the story.

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