

Risen



Christ

The Nativity of the Lord

25 December 2025 - Year A

The Catholic Communities of Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham & St Francis Xavier, Montmorency



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation who are the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respect to the elders past, present and emerging.

Dear Parishioners & Friends of
Risen Christ Parish, Eltham & Montmorency,
Merry Christmas 2025! We have made it through
another year! But not without incident -
unfortunately!

Over these special Christmas Days, and weeks leading
into the 2026 New Year ... I am simply filled with
'gratitude' for life in general and your perseverance to
be involved and continue to want to be a part of the
Christian story in Eltham and Montmorency. Gratitude
for the 'Gift of Life' that comes through the message
of the Gospel over this weekend - that the birth of
Jesus is an event in time, for all time, for
all creation and for ever!

Gratitude for the gift of life that
shines through each and everyone.

The terrible and evil events of
that warm Sunday night on 14th
December at Bondi Beach, Sydney,
will continue to affect us all as we
navigate our family time together!

Please continue to be gentle with each other,
especially any new comers and visitor to our homes.

As usual, at this time of the year, I am indeed
'thankful' to all those who helped in small and obvious
ways to keep the spirit of Jesus alive and well
throughout this past year at SFX and OLHC. It
certainly hasn't been easy, but we made it! And finally,
a very big "THANK YOU" to everyone involved in these
Christmas Masses, I am very grateful for your help
and love during these busy days. Warmest 'Peace and
Blessings' to you and your families over these festive
days, and also our thoughts and prayers for all those
families caught up in the terrorist attack at Bondi - on
our shores!

May the Christmas message of Peace fill your hearts
with gratitude too! Warmest love, Michael



Gospel: Luke 2:1-14

Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of
the whole world to be taken. This census - the
first - took place while Quirinius was governor of
Syria, and everyone went to his own town to be
registered. So Joseph set out from the town of
Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea,
to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he
was of David's House and line in order to be
registered together with Mary, his betrothed,
who was with child.

While they were there the time came for her to
have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her
first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling
clothes, and laid him in a manger because there
was no room for them at the inn.

In the countryside close by there were shepherds
who lived in the fields and took it in turns to
watch their flocks during the night. The angel of
the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the
Lord shone round them. They were terrified,
but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Listen, I
bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by
the whole people. Today in the town of David a
saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the
Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a
baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in
a manger.' And suddenly with the angel there
was a great throng of the heavenly host, praising
God and singing:

'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and
peace to men who enjoy his favour'.

Reflection - Break Open the Word 2026:

Christmas carols, the Christmas crib, Christmas cards have told this story often. Yes, it is well-known. Yet hearing this story on Christmas night is a highlight of the feast. It demands to be read deliberately, with a sense of wonder and the freshness of a first hearing.

The angels make clear what we already know: in the birth of this baby, we behold an amazing divine intervention in human affairs. We join in the song of praise: *Glory to God in the highest.*

The short gospel text set down for the Mass at Dawn follows on directly from tonight's passage. Given that few people will go to a second early morning Mass, a parish might decide to combine the two readings so that the story is completed by the arrival of the shepherds at the manger and the telling of their awe-inspiring story.

*This parish has a commitment to ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people in our community.
We support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into institutional abuse and pray for all the survivors.*



HOPE IN THE BIRTH OF A BABY

The angels' message, "tidings of great joy" as the King James Bible memorably puts it, was a message of hope. The shepherds must have needed some convincing. Hope in the form of a tiny baby? Born of parents who had been turned away from every inn in Bethlehem and had been forced to spend the night of their baby's birth in a stable? Even at the time, the absence of basic hygiene must have been striking. Was there even a midwife? Scripture records almost no details, except "swaddling clothes". Yet millions of pregnant women down the ages, feeling their time approaching, have looked to Mary for comfort and consolation in their own forthcoming ordeal. They have felt a sense of intimacy and solidarity with that uniquely special mother, who they believed would pray for them throughout their labour and would be a heavenly protector for their new-born child. Births do not always have a happy outcome, so trusting in a divine mother who has shared in their hopes and fears can make even the greatest anguish more bearable. Yet women who experience the stillbirth of their child often find nothing within their parish or diocese to help them and their family through their feelings of grief and loss. The Church could do much more for women who have had a miscarriage or stillbirth.

The idea of a virgin birth is not an easy one, and it became fashionable for liberal theologians to pour cold water on it. What occurred in that stable in Bethlehem was "a remote gynaecological event about which we can know nothing" as one Catholic theologian has pointed out. Speculation is pointless, and there are no further facts waiting to be found that could prove or disprove the Church's teaching - rooted in Scripture and tradition - that Mary was a virgin "before, during and after" the birth of Christ. But she certainly shared the relief and joy of every mother at a successful delivery, the foundation of the deep and enduring bond between mother and child. She would surely have returned to that memory at the foot of the Cross.

Giving birth remains a dangerous business. Women still die in childbirth, even in modern Britain, and particularly if they are from a racial minority, so statistics have revealed. Babies die too, sometimes through oversight and neglect. Childbirth is a uniquely female hazard, and the fact that men escape it may go some way to explaining why maternity services are low down the list of health priorities. Institutional misogyny certainly exists, in the health service and in politics. Too many women come away from the experience of giving birth with long-lasting emotional wounds from their ordeal in the labour ward. Warning signs are missed, doctors and nurses are tired and overworked and the mother's own anxieties and pains are swept aside. Too often, those who lose a baby are left in the depths of despair. British governments must have known all this for decades, but have only just realised how unacceptable it is. They must not be allowed to lose interest again. Midwives, meanwhile, need their own new deal, more so perhaps than hospital doctors, though they are less likely to strike, knowing how much women depend on them.

From the coloured lights adorning high streets and side streets, the noisy jollification in clubs and pubs and feel-good specials all over the TV schedules, anybody might conclude it was coming up to someone's birthday. Why, then, have the principal participants in this celebration - mother and child, Mary and her son Jesus - been pushed to the margins? Is it because appreciating the event in all its mystery and glory requires the softer side of human nature, less brutal and cruel, less hurried and impatient, less "masculine", in the worst sense of that word? It's not just, as is often said, that the true spirit of Christmas has fallen under the wheels of the juggernaut of commercialism, monetisation, commodification and marketisation, and been crushed by it. What is being lost is something deeper, an instinct of respect for life itself, for the



wondrous nature of pregnancy and the sacred mystery of the human reproductive process. Almost without a blink, the British Parliament recently voted to decriminalise abortion at any point up to birth, largely in tribute to the concept of women's absolute bodily autonomy. And if infant life is so disposable on that principle, it follows that the end of life has equally been emptied of its sacred significance. This is the poisoned tip of the secular arrow, so some changes which were once unthinkable have come to pass: assisted suicide, infanticide in the womb - what next? The parlous state of maternity services may reflect the same indifference to life and its origins.

There is meaning still to be found in the seasonal festivities, not least the metaphor of light. The outrageous assault on Australian Jews celebrating Hanukkah in Bondi near Sydney could be seen as a determined effort to switch off the light of faith. Light is akin to joy. The Hanukkah Menorah, nine candles lit in succession as the days pass, like Advent candles in Christian churches and homes, mark the advance of light and the retreat of darkness. They point to the prospect of a brighter future, not just materially but spiritually.

What characterises the Jewish community is its extraordinary resilience, and that is only possible with hope, faith in the future. It is the bold and brave defiance of the message of antisemitism, which is the desire to see the Jewish people disappear. Some see in that demonic desire a determination to quench monotheism at its source, and so to make the world safer for god-like tyrants who can allow no rival deities. Grand deities, but also little ones, when people dismiss any possibility of a God "out there" but elevate themselves to divine status instead, makers of their own commandments. The role of the Jews is not just to be a light unto the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6), but to discomfort them. No wonder it makes the Jewish people unpopular.

The world's approach to Christmas is ambivalent. Candles can still be lit even in the darkness. Humanity cannot live without light, which means without hope, which means without joy. Light is a basic need. Whenever Christmas has been banned, it has reappeared; it offers something no purely secular celebration can match. It is both sacred and profane, a time for joyful prayer and less joyful hangovers. It is about being human, in all its messiness and splendour. We hope our dear readers can enjoy it to the full.