

# Mercy & Love



BISHOP BRIAN MASCORD'S PASTORAL MESSAGE FOR CHRISTMAS 2023



**M**y sisters and brothers in Christ and to all people of goodwill in the Diocese of Wollongong,

Grace, peace, and a very happy Christmas to you and your loved ones.

I recently had the joy of leading a pilgrimage to the Holy Land—a wonderful time of prayer, reflection, and connection with God. In pondering the Christmas mystery of Emmanuel, God with us, I am drawn back to my experience in the land that was truly the cradle of our faith. In an unremarkable little town, far from the centres of power, a child was born whose life, death, and resurrection would change the course of history.

As I stepped into the cave that, as tradition holds, was the place where Jesus was born, I was overcome by the humility of our Saviour King. This cave would not have been adorned by the smell of incense or the shimmering of gold. Instead, on that first Christmas day, the incense was the fragrance of a flock of sheep, and the gold was the adoring gaze of a mother and father who had fled their home for fear of losing their lives. Standing in the cave where a feeding box for animals held God himself, I was overwhelmed.

**A God who became so small could only be mercy and love.**

ST THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

This celebration of the coming of Jesus should remind us that, in a certain sense, every day is Christmas and an opportunity to welcome Emmanuel—God with us—into our lives. We do not need to be afraid nor concerned that we are not “fitting” for him, for surely, “A God who became so small could only be mercy and love” (St Thérèse of Lisieux).

Therefore, with St Ambrose of Milan, I invite you to, “Open wide your door to the One who comes. Open your soul, throw open the depths of your heart to see the riches of simplicity, the treasures of peace, the sweetness of grace. Open your heart and run to meet the Sun of eternal light that illuminates all people.”

And let us join together in prayer for those places in our world, particularly the Holy Land, mired by hatred and violence. May the one we call Prince of Peace bring peace to our world and the heart of all humanity.

Happy Christmas and the blessings of Christ’s love.

Yours in Christ,

*Brian Mascord*

**Most Rev Brian G Mascord DD**  
BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG  
19 December 2023

