



Anglican Diocese of Newcastle

Media Release

Tuesday, December 11, 2007

For Immediate Release

Presents or Presence

A Christmas Message from Bishop Brian Farran, the Anglican Bishop of Newcastle

We do think hard about the gifts we give at Christmas. We want our gifts to express something of ourselves and to be really appropriate for the persons to whom we give them. We want our gifts to celebrate and to honour the persons to whom they are given.

I know it takes me a lot of time to find that right gift, especially for those whom you love the most. The gift as a present takes the giver as a presence to the one receiving the gift.

I have had occasions with the opening of Christmas presents when I have been moved to tears by the amazing generosity and obvious love of some family member's present to me. The heart-felt comments as presents are unwrapped and the whoops of joy testify to the significance of the gifts received and their appropriateness.

Our present giving at Christmas is of course in direct imitation of God the Father's gift of the baby Jesus. And all of us know how emotionally powerful our first sight of a newly born babe is. Christmas is loaded with deep feelings.

Originally Christmas brought to us the depth of God's feelings for us, God's self-giving and inexhaustible love for humankind. The most powerful and complete expression of God's love is in the self-giving of God in His Son, Jesus.

God's present of the baby Jesus puts God firmly within human history and experience. Jesus as God's present brings to us for all time God's intimate presence.

And the choice of the gift – an expression of the very life of God with a human face – powerfully affirms how significant we are to God the unique gift-giver.

Just as our presents express something of our love and generosity and our affection for those to whom we give them, so too uniquely does God express generosity and affection for the whole of humankind. The gift of Jesus is given to the whole of humankind, without distinction.

God's generosity and universal affection can be imitated now by us as we celebrate this amazing festival of Christmas with its offer of God's presence for all time.

Christmas offers a world tired of violence, greed and disregards of human rights a vision for universal love and dignity for all people.

Just as any present needs to be unwrapped and accepted, so too does the gift of God's Son at Christmas and the new order of life that Jesus brings. We unwrap the central gift of Christmas by accepting Jesus as God's Son and by practising Jesus' teaching.

Christmas is about presence – God’s intimate presence with us – hence, our practice of giving to others presents that imitate that Divine love. The best present we can give is our own practice of the values of Jesus.

A happy and holy Christmas to you and yours!

ENDS

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