

The Gifts of Christmas

Reflections for Advent



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Advent is a time for preparation and anticipation; God is preparing us for the birth of Jesus which will come in new and unexpected ways in our lives today.

We mark our journey to the Festival of Christmas by lighting a candle on the Advent wreath each week.

The wreath with no beginning or end firstly symbolises the immortality of our souls, and God's promise of everlasting life to us through Jesus.

Each candle represents one of the blessings of Christmas: hope, faith, joy and peace. These are the true gifts of Christmas, the gifts given to us as those who seek how the life of Jesus is birthed more deeply in our hearts and in our world.

The Christmas blessing is represented by a fifth white candle symbolising love.

Lives marked by these gifts are radiant lives, lives that bear the life of Jesus in our world, lives transparent of this Promise and the possibilities of our world.

This resource may be used by individuals or small groups over the four weeks of Advent.

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The First Gift: The Gift of HOPE

1

Living With Expectation

Light the candle of Hope (purple) on the Advent Wreath.

SCRIPTURE

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

REFLECT

As we light this first candle on the Advent wreath, we see the darkness disappear and a glimmer of hope emerge. This light will grow as each candle on the wreath is lit, bringing us closer each week to the joyful celebration of Christmas.

With the birth of Jesus, new light and new hope entered the world. Where do you need hope in your life today?

PRAY

Jesus, you are the source of our hope. By your birth in Bethlehem, you brought hope to our messy world as the promises of God were fulfilled. As we begin this Advent journey, help us to prepare our hearts to receive you in a new way at Christmas. Awaken in us a new hope so that we can see the wonder of Christmas in the people and situations around us. Give us the grace to be people of hope to others. Amen.

On the First Sunday of Advent...

We light our first candle, the candle that represents hope. Hope – like faith, joy, peace and love – is not simply a feeling. Hope is not merely optimism. Just as I can discover peace in the midst of conflict, joy in the presence of sadness, faith in the confusion of doubt, so I can also experience hope in the presence of uncertainty and even disillusionment. This is because hope is not just about positive thinking. It is not Pollyanna. It does not deny the problems and the obstacles before us. Indeed, none of the Christmas blessings for which we open our hearts over these weeks deny reality. They accept reality as it is. As the late Australian Jesuit writer and poet, Peter Steele was fond of saying, “Genuine spirituality consists in this: letting it come home deeply and truly how things are and responding out of that situation.” Therefore, we are not those who substitute reality with cliché. Rather, all of the blessings for which we pray and mark by a candle, each in their own way, recognise a wider framework, a deeper context, a higher possibility.

When it comes to being people who live with hope, then, we are not those who abdicate the sense that things might actually be going quite awry. We are not those who might pretend that everything will always turn out ok. Things may not turn out as we would wish. Bad things happen to good people as we know. Yet, even in the darkness of our disappointment and despair about how things might be, we can still hope.

This is because Christian hope is not only about the future, it is intrinsically linked with memory. When we talk about hope ordinarily, we tend to think about something turning out for the best in the future. But we do not necessarily know how things will turn out. Sometimes we have to be prepared that things will not turn out as we would want.

Yet, our hearts remain hope filled. It is our memory that gives birth to our hope. We remember what God has done. We remember the long journey of salvation. We remember how God has acted to bring freedom out of bondage, movement out of paralysis, life out of death.

We remember those who put their trust in the Promise given them and the way in which God was active in all the events of their lives, fulfilling his promise even when, at first, it could not be evident.

In savouring all this memory of our people, we develop this profound intuition that what is in front of us is not the last word. There is always something more than our own disappointments, our own disillusionments, our own despair. There is something bigger at work, something more encompassing. We are not simply abandoned to our own limitation and finitude. We have a much larger canvass on which to situate our own experience and by which to see ourselves.

All of this renders us with an expectation about life itself. It gives us an answer to the question about life. One of the fundamental questions with which people struggle is whether life is for them or against them. Many interpret that life is not for them. Life is too full of setbacks and obstacles. Consequently, people lead lives of quiet despair, entrapped within cynicism, fear, anger and sadness. We see it etched on their faces and outlined in their conversations.

But because of the memory we celebrate as a community of faith, we are those who believe that life is ultimately gracious, that life is irreducibly blessed, that life is holy and sacred. Life is good. And we dare to assert this even in the face of those difficulties we know. We know it is good, because we know there is a proven Love that holds

it all together. And therefore, we are those who live with a fundamental expectation about life. This expectation gives us the freedom both to seek out the little rays of possibility which present themselves with simplicity and ordinariness and to wonder about the grander design of events. We learn to “expect the presence of God in everything I meet and everything I do. . . What does God

have in mind for me? What does God expect of me? What is he saying to me through the things that are happening in my world, and what is my response?”

To live with this expectation means to live our lives as those awake. Our hearts are not closed, enclosed, entombed. They are vigilant, alert, surprised. They are alive. This how the writer, Jurgen Moltmann illustrates how the first Christians prayed:

“**standing**, looking up, with arms out-stretched, and eyes wide open, ready to walk or to leap forward. We can see this from the pictures in the catacombs in Rome. Their posture reflects tense expectation, not quiet heart searching. It says... We are on the watch, in expectation of the One who is coming... People who know that there is someone who is waiting for them and expecting them never give themselves up. And we are expected.” ¹

1 Jurgen Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, translated by Margaret Kohl, (Fortress Press, 2004), 84-85.

We believe
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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Which phrase or sentence stood out for you most clearly in this reflection? Why?
2. What do you understand ‘hope’ to mean? Has your understanding of ‘hope’ changed after reading this reflection?
3. What do you think is the difference between ‘optimism’ and ‘hope’?
4. In what way does the ‘memory’ of God’s salvation underpin hope in your life?
5. Can you share an example of when you have been aware of this gift of hope in a difficult situation?
6. Do you think you are living your life awake to the possibilities and expectation of a God who comes to us? How might you be more open to this expectation this Christmas?

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the gift of hope in the midst of whatever may happen in my life. Deepen my capacity to remain hopeful, and remove any traces of despair that may creep in. Allow me to live in your presence and maintain a joyful expectation of your coming into my life in a new way this Christmas. Amen.

The Second Gift: The Gift of FAITH

Living With Trust

Light the candles of Hope and Faith (purple)

SCRIPTURE

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail. "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. (Luke 1:35-38)

REFLECT

As we listen to the Scripture texts this Advent, we see Mary, a woman of deep faith who trusted in God so completely that she cooperated with God's action in her life, allowing Jesus to be born into the world. Are you able to trust in God with a steadfast faith?

PRAY

Jesus, as our Advent light increases with the lighting of this second candle, increase in us the gift of faith. Give us patience in our waiting, and where we are doubtful, give us a trusting heart and confidence in Your love for us. Let our faith burn brightly within us so that we can be a light to others, sharing with them the Good News that Your birth inaugurated in the world. Amen.

On the Second Sunday of Advent...

We light our second candle, the candle signifying the gift of faith. Its flame reminds us that we are to live in a spirit of trust.

Who do we trust, and why? What creates trust and what spreads mistrust? Our capacity to trust is in considerable crisis, and there is hardly a sphere of our life that is not affected. Indeed, Bernard Salt, writing in March 2019 in The Australian suggested that our own decade is the one in which trust has gone bust. Our trust in the Church has largely died. But not only the Church.

Our trust in other institutions such as the financial sector has also died. Our trust in institutions to keep our aged and those with disability safe has died. But as Salt comments, "the loss of trust breeds cynicism and creates social division; it rationalises self-interest; it is the antithesis of a united, loving and generous society." ¹

Subsequently, we are provided with the context of the article Michael Leunig penned some years ago, "In the midst of madness." ² He began the essay observing that, "on street corners, people talk of the growing madness. They speak in a dialect that survives in the instincts of young and old, rich and

poor, males and females . . . 'The world has gone mad,' they say. In tones of dismay, resignation and humour they confirm their suspicions to each other. It's as if this is a new kind of greeting or farewell." Yet, as Leunig comments, "it is also their small way of grieving together about the tragic state of their world; about the destruction of meaning or the rise of hostility, ugliness and stupidity in an angry, exhausted culture." This is hardly new as Leunig suggests, "Of course, this windswept conversation on street corners is ancient. With a twinkling smile my grandmother used to offer me the old refrain, 'The whole world is mad except for you and me – and even you're a little strange.'" There is, however, a new dimension to it all, according to Leunig. "There have never been so many people on the planet to lose their marbles and there have never been such powerful and precocious devices, machines and weapons to express and give form to insanity. Their looming presence has given rise to an unprecedented critical mass of fear and anger on the planet – enough to drive humanity into panic and over the edge." Leunig is of the opinion that we seem to live in a time where there is a "surge of a compulsive new bitterness and hostility, an antisocial infection... it is the driver behind you, angrily blasting their horn because your acceleration at the green light is not fast enough. It is the

righteous ugly clash of a televised political debate, the spiteful intensity and punishing fury of a gender equality discussion . . .” As Leunig comments people lament about the state of the world, however “they also yearn. Sanity may not prevail, but it lives on as a vision of love somewhere in the minds of ordinary people.” In other words, even in the face of our disappointments or disillusionments we still want to trust. We know the toxicity of resentment become cynicism.

We want something more for ourselves than this poison. We want to breathe the fresh air of faith again – faith in ourselves, faith in others, faith in God. There is no future wrapped in fear. Fear closes us in, it encloses us into patterns of defensiveness and protection, it paralyses us, renders us inert, closes us down. Like smoke that can fill the air at times of bushfire, it leaves us in some kind of murky fog in which we struggle to breathe. We yearn to be able to breathe fresh, clean air again. If only we could believe.

We speak today of our society as not being particularly religious. Statistics tell us that now 8 out of 10 weddings, for example, are performed by civil celebrants.³ But this does not mean that people don’t want to believe. People generally want to believe, even if people’s belief and trust can so easily be frustrated, re-emerging then in strange esoteric, occult ways or in the many addictions that mask the desire for trust. Perhaps Christmas remains important in the world at large because it is one of those narratives that at least implies trust, even if it cannot be realised in the way people wish, especially the trust that goes hand in hand with innocence. We want to know that we are loved, that nature is not entirely arbitrary, that something is possible. The story of Christmas somehow speaks to us that this is true. This is why we keep telling it year after year, without ever tiring of it. We

keep wanting it to be true. We want to trust. We want to believe that life is ultimately good.

And so, as we prepare for Christmas, we light a candle for faith alongside our candle for hope. The light of the candle is fragile, but it is unmistakable. Like the light of every candle it does not do away completely with the shadows, but it creates a circle of clarity for us. In lighting this candle, we say,

“I believe.” We say, “there is so much smoke in my life, so much that leaves me in a kind of fog; so many are the shadows that creep around me. And yet, I dare to believe that Someone has come into the world with a message of a different voice than the instinctive and ordinary patterns of responding, with a pathway of genuine freedom. His name is Jesus. Help me never to forget this.” For if we keep faith in what we have been given in Jesus, if our belief in him deepens through all that challenges it, our lives themselves will become more trusting – not in a way that is naïve or sentimental – but in a way that simply doesn’t require the same level of pretence or defence - and therefore in a way that

can move out to others beyond all the self-protective barriers - because in Jesus we know that we are loved eternally, we know that there is always a future for us – and not only for us, but for all. Trusting lives are ones that are open and free, more gracious and more hospitable.

Therefore, let us believe once more. Let us have faith. Let us trust. Let us be free.

1. Bernard Salt, The Australian, 30 March 2019.

2. Michael Leunig, “In the Midst of Madness,” Spectrum, The Sydney Morning Herald, 30-31 July 2016, 8-9.

3. In 1902, 97% of all marriages in Australia were performed by ministers of religion. By 2017, 78% of marriages were performed by civil celebrants. See Marriage Rates in Australia, Australian Institute of Family Studies, <https://aifs.gov.au/facts-and-figures/marriage-rates-australia>

Its flame
reminds us
that we
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in a spirit of
trust.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Which phrase or sentence stood out for you most clearly in this reflection? Why?
2. Do you agree with the assessment given of the toxicity of modern life? Where have you seen this ‘madness’ in today’s world?
3. In what ways might a fragile, small candle be a symbol of the gift of faith?
4. This reflection highlights the marked difference between the lack of trust in society, and the gift of faith at Christmas. How can you bring more of this Christmas narrative to the world around you this year?
5. What are you most yearning for this Christmas?
6. The reflection states that “in Jesus we know that we are loved eternally, we know that there is always a future for us – and not only for us, but for all.” What difference does faith in Jesus make in your life? Are you able to trust Him?

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the gift of faith in Jesus that allows me to trust in a hopeful future. Deepen my belief this Christmas, and let your light shine through the fog in my life so that I can know that I am loved, and be able to live in the freedom that you offer me. Amen.

The Third Gift: The Gift of JOY

Living With Gratitude

Light the candles of Hope and Faith (purple), and the Candle of Joy (pink)

SCRIPTURE

But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11)

REFLECT

This third candle is the Candle of Joy, reminding us of the joy of our salvation in Christ. The colour pink speaks of this joy,

and we sense that Christmas is now near. In what area of your life would you like the joy of Christ to enter?

PRAY

Jesus, your presence in our lives brings us a joy that is unwavering. Give us an awareness of a deep sense of joy even in the ordinary moments of our life, as well as in our more difficult times. You came to bring life and joy to all people of the world. We pray for those who are hurting this Christmas, that they might experience Your joy through hearing the Good News of Christ and through the love of others. Amen.

On the Third Sunday of Advent...

As we continue our Advent journey, the sense of expectation in our waiting increases. Christmas fills us with a sense of wonder and anticipation. The outcome of wonder is joy. And so, we lit the third candle of our Advent wreath – the rose-coloured candle - designated for the gift of joy that is given to us as people of both hope and faith.

As those who watch for the birth of the Lord's life in the world, we are people of joy!

Like hope and faith, joy is not simply a feeling. It is not equated with happiness. Happiness is a feeling that occurs in response to what happens around us. But joy is something far deeper. In fact, we can feel sad, but we can still be joyful. There is much that happens that affects our feelings. We can feel deeply uncertain and anxious because of the threat of fire or flood that might surround us; we can feel sad at the tragedies that occur and in which we might be involved; we can feel angry at the actions or inaction of government to address structures of injustice. And yet we can still be people of hope, joy and peace. This is because hope, joy and peace are not feelings. Rather they are

profound recognitions of what is given to us in our faith, our belief that something new has come into our world through the birth of Jesus Christ, and that, therefore, the world is no longer the same. We are no longer the same. No longer are we simply at the mercy of randomness and arbitrariness. Rather, we are enveloped by a mystery of love that holds us, sustains us, and opens for us a future always.

Happiness is the outcome of the achievement of our aspirations. But Joy is the outcome of the experience of being loved, of rejoicing in a promise which has been given to us being fulfilled. And this promise proclaimed at Christmas is "I am with you." As Pope Paul VI taught, "If Jesus radiates such peace, such assurance, such happiness, such availability, it is by reason of the inexpressible love by which he knows that he is loved by his Father. The disciples are called to share this joy: Jesus wishes them to have in themselves his joy in its fullness... This is the paradox of the Christian condition which sheds particular light on that of the human condition: neither trials nor sufferings have been eliminated from this world, but they take on new meaning in the certainty of sharing in the redemption

wrought by the Lord and of sharing in his glory. This is why the Christian, though subject to the difficulties of human life, is not reduced to groping for the way; nor do they see in death the end of their hopes..."¹

Paul VI went on to say that it is precisely this Joy that gives the heart a catholic openness to the world of people. This is because the joy that comes from knowing we are part of a much larger story than simply the one before us, indicates to us that whatever might present before us, no matter how upsetting it might be, is not the final word. There is always something more. And because there is something more, our hearts remain open, not enclosed, living and awake not entombed in despair.

John the Baptist, a figure not simply of repentance, teaches us during Advent to be constantly on the watch for the ways that the Kingdom of God is birthed in our world: when justice transforms injustice, when reconciliation transforms alienation, when atonement transforms arrogance, when mutuality transforms competitiveness, when forgiveness transforms resentment. And we are not only to watch for these moments but to rejoice when we recognise them! The Advent person is not locked up in their own private world, but alert to all the signs of the Kingdom's coming around them.

The Advent person, the person truly waiting for the coming of their Lord, celebrates all these moments of transformation as possibilities or otherwise for the Kingdom. We are in this sense, "Kingdom-spotters" –

just as was John the Baptist himself. We live expectantly, rejoicing when we see the signs of the Kingdom birthed in our midst.

Living joyfully means we live then with gratitude, with hearts grateful for what we see and hear around us. The opposite of gratitude is criticism. A life marked by criticism is a sad life because it always places a demand on

life that can never be realised. So, a critical life is one that is saturated with disappointment and resentment. It becomes bitter and cynical, never at peace, never at rest. It separates people, keeping them constantly at a distance.

A life, however, that is marked with gratitude is one that is gracious. It recognises goodness; it breathes the humility to acknowledge the blessings that are occurring – yes, even in the midst of difficulties and challenges. It is a life that remains open to possibility. The sense of gratitude develops a gracious heart – a graced way of being. One of the greatest compliments

that we can give another is that they are gracious.

A gracious person radiates an unmistakable openness of being, a lightness of encounter, a warmth and a dignity that emerges from a confident humility. That each of us would be gracious! This is a sure sign that the life of the Lord has truly been birthed within us. Let each of us be this light of joy in our world.

1. Pope Paul VI, *Gaudete in Domini*, "On Christian Joy," Apostolic Exhortation (9 May 1975)

A gracious
person
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and dignity...
humility.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Which phrase or sentence stood out for you most clearly in this reflection? Why?
2. What do you understand 'joy' to mean? Has your understanding of 'joy' changed after reading this reflection? How would you describe the difference between 'happiness' and 'joy'?
3. Can you share an example of when you have experienced the gift of joy in a difficult situation?
4. Can you think of times when you have recognised signs of the Kingdom of God being birthed in our world?
5. How would you describe the difference that the birth of Jesus made to the world?
6. Do you feel you live a life marked more by gratitude or by criticism? In what ways might you grow in graciousness?

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the presence of Jesus in my life, and for the gift of joy even in times of difficulty and uncertainty. Help me to see where Jesus is being birthed again in the world around me this Christmas. Increase in me a grateful heart that recognises that there is always something more, beyond the challenges I see. Amen

4

The Fourth Gift: The Gift of PEACE

Living With Love

Light the candles of Hope, Faith, Joy and Peace (purple)

SCRIPTURE

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

REFLECT

This fourth candle reminds us that the coming of Jesus brings peace and goodwill to all people. The peace that Jesus offers us is a reassurance that in Christ, all will be well. Where in your life do you seek the gift of peace today?

PRAY

Jesus, open our hearts to receive your peace, a peace that is constant amidst the worry and unrest we sometimes face. In the busyness of the Christmas season, give us the grace to slow down and experience each day the peace that You offer us. Let us be instruments of Your peace to our families, friends, colleagues and neighbours, especially those most anxious. May the peace of Christ fill every heart this Christmas. Amen.

On the Fourth Sunday of Advent...

The Sunday before Christmas, we light the fourth candle for Advent – the candle of peace. Over our journey we have lit candles for hope, for faith, for joy. Lastly, we do so for peace. Peace is the quality that perhaps we most often associate with Christmas. It is the quality we want to surround our coming celebration – the outcome of the lights, the gifts, the carols, our Christmas Mass, our family gathering. For a few brief moments, Christmas promises us peace. We catch our breath; we glimpse innocence; we let go of the demands of our work; we rest. That peace might reign is our ardent prayer.

Peace in this sense, however, is very transitory. It is as fleeting as a quiet nap on Christmas afternoon, or a few quiet hours on Boxing Day. And for many in Australia, at this time of the year there may be little peace as they remain vigilant for fire with all the anxiety that bushfire brings; or perhaps with damaging flooding brought by recent La Niña weather patterns. There are many families in different parts of the country who are having to come to terms with the destruction of their homes and property. Christmas will not be peaceful as they try to gather the fragments of their lives and consider an unknown future. We think, too, of those families who lose loved ones around this time and for whom Christmas will be

marked by sadness and a heartbreaking absence. Where is the peace of Christmas for these people?

For the people in the Christmas story events are hardly peaceful, either, in fact. They are anxious times. Mary is near the full term of her pregnancy: she is traveling to a distant place. What certainty might she have in being able to deliver her child safely? The young couple don't have the luxury of online booking – they have to turn up to Bethlehem for a politically motivated census without knowing where they might lodge. They discover there is nowhere for them to stay. They are abandoned; on their own, away from any support of family or friends. Can we imagine their terror as their child is delivered without any assistance at all? The entire situation is charged with anxiety.

And yet the Nativity scene presents to us as one bathed in peace, quietness, stillness. The paradox presents as altogether curious. It teaches us that the peace of Christmas, just as the hope, faith and joy that underscore it, is not simply a feeling. As we have recounted throughout our journey of Advent, we can be concerned, confused and sad and yet we can be full of hope, faith and joy. So, too, we can be anxious and yet be peaceful. This is because peace is not the absence

of conflict; it is not the alleviation of concern; it is not the freedom from care. The peace of Christmas is not given to us through the exercise of techniques of meditation and relaxation that restore our emotional equilibrium. If only it all came that simply. As various accounts in the Gospel teach us, the peace that Jesus gives us, however, is that which is found in the midst of the storm, not apart from the storm. Peace is what holds us steady in the midst of all the turbulence.

And what holds us steady? The knowledge that a baby has smiled. When any baby smiles at us our own hearts always leap for joy. The smile of a baby towards us is a profound assurance of the goodness of life, of our own goodness. Our interaction with a smiling baby restores us to the truth of ourselves, to our own loveableness and the loveableness of life itself. But in the baby of the Nativity, it is God who smiles at us.¹ And this smile influences our whole perspective on life and on ourselves. It frees us; it dispels our self-doubt; it opens our entire countenance, our whole being. In that moment we see ourselves loved and unconditionally valued. And we are never the same. The moment may be brief, but its effect is eternal. It marks indelibly.

And this indelible mark at the core of who we are enables us to stand in the midst of all our cares, concerns and contingencies with an assurance that we are part of something much larger than ourselves; that something has been achieved that is not dependent on us; that a promise has been given that will see its fulfillment even if not entirely by ourselves. This is the peace of Christmas. It is a peace that

God has
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to give us
hope.

lives underneath whatever we might feel in the face of our ever-changing circumstances.

Peace is the gift that Jesus wishes to give us above all others. He says to us just before he dies, My gift to you is peace. And the peace I want to give you is the peace that I myself know, the peace that I have because I know that I am held in love by my Father, a love that will never leave me, the

love which gives me my very identity. This is the peace that I carry into whatever is about to happen to me even if this threatens to extinguish me. This is the peace that I want you, too, to have. It is my legacy to you. For if you believe in this peace then you will also know my joy, my own joy will become complete in you. And it is because you live in this peace and in this joy you will be free – free of fear, free to love. Lives of hope, faith, joy and peace – these are loving lives: lives capable of going out beyond themselves in attention and care of others. And so, in a few days' time we will light the Christmas Candle symbolising love, the crown of all

the other lights upon which we have reflected.

Faith, hope, joy, peace, love: these are all deeply interconnected. They are not independent of one another, such that we might have one of them and not the others. To believe that God has become one of us, one with us, is to give us hope in a future. It is to gift us with joy and the peace that comes from this faith. They are the greatest gifts we are given to us who believe in the mystery of Christmas. May they be our true lights this Christmas and as we journey into a new year.

1. The smile of God was the theme of Pope Francis' Christmas Greetings to Vatican Employees and their Families, 21 December 2019. See <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-offers-christmas-greetings-to-vatican-employees-and-families/>

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Which phrase or sentence stood out for you most clearly in this reflection? Why?
2. What do you understand 'peace' to mean? How does the gift of peace differ from a 'feeling'?
3. Do you think it is possible to have peace in the midst of turbulence? Can you share an example of when you have experienced the gift of peace in a difficult situation?
4. What difference does it make to you to know that God smiles lovingly at you and that you are held in God's love?
5. Do you feel that as a Christian you are part of a larger story? In what way?
6. Which gift do you yearn for the most this Christmas – hope, faith, joy or peace? Why? Pray to God for it now.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the deep peace that you offer to me and to the world. Allow me and my loved ones to experience this peace at Christmas, regardless of any challenges that present themselves. Help me to know that I am part of a Christian story that is much larger than myself, and to trust that your promises will always be fulfilled. May the gifts of hope, faith, joy and peace flow abundantly from Your heart into mine, and through me, to everyone around me this Christmas. Amen.

The Gifts of HOPE, FAITH, JOY and PEACE be yours this Christmas!



CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF
BROKEN BAY

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