**A time of Hope…**

**A message from Most Rev Peter A Comensoli**

**Archbishop of Melbourne**

**Christmas 2019**

Hello friends,

I love Christmas. It is such a beautiful time of hope. Behind the tinsel, the advertising, the stress and frantic energy of the season, we encounter a profound simplicity in the story of God’s arrival.

We just need to think about Mary and Joseph. They weren’t welcomed into any warm hotel or inn; they weren’t able to put themselves down by the fireplace in someone’s home. They had come from far away and arrived in a place they did not know.

They could be like us after a long journey when nobody welcomes or acknowledges you. You can become quite despondent: no family around you; far from home; and in Mary and Joseph’s case, a child on the way. It can seem like a story of isolation.

And yet, in the midst of a simple stable, a home for working animals, this most precious gift is given to us—a little boy, who against all the odds and in a place of somewhat hopelessness, becomes not merely a symbol of hope but who is hope itself. A hope for us.

He is a real baby, flesh and blood, with all the tears and the smiles of any little baby, and yet he is also the Son of God. *Emmanuel.* God among us.

In the distance, the angels were singing their hymns of hope, and shepherds were learning something about how this hope was coming into their lives. These shepherds—traditionally considered the ‘lowly’ in society—gifted with Hope itself. So, when we look upon this child, we can sense the stirrings of hope within ourselves—hope for new life, new beginnings, and the promise of peace.

He has brought unimaginable joy—joy into his own family who loved him, but also a joy that the whole world needs.

This is not just a story that we might tell each year at Christmas time. It is not just something of the past. Jesus lives now. Jesus lives in us, and Jesus lives for us today.

In today’s world of change and uncertainty, we long for God to step gently into our lives, lovingly and tenderly reaching out to each one of us. So, as we busily prepare our homes for the arrival perhaps of family and friends at Christmas time, I invite you to take the time to prepare your hearts to welcome Him who offers himself to us.

May I wish you a beautiful, joyful and hope-filled Christmas.