



Christmas Message 2023:

My dear Brothers and Sisters

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isa. 9:1). It’s time for us to pause and see this Light and feel its warmth. As we celebrate Christmas Masses as one parish family, may the light of Christ illuminate your ways and fill your homes.

All the readings for all the various Christmas liturgies proclaim the same mystery: **The Incarnation**. God not only authors life and sustains it, he chooses to become one of us. Whatever the circumstances of your life right now; grief or joy, struggle or success, faith or doubt, love or betrayal, Jesus has lived it himself, and he longs to live it with you. Allow Him to enter into your moments and give you the life for which you were created.

I would like to thank each and every one of you for your commitment to our parish this past year. The giving of your time, and talent to the Lord continues to reflect God’s presence in our community.

My Christmas message this year is to encourage all of us to become more involved in the Church’s roster and other responsibilities. It is not so much a question of giving more; it is a **question of giving more of ourselves**. Moreover, that’s what God did when he entered our world at the first Christmas. God will fill us with His peace if there is room for Him in our lives.

In closing, my only prayer today, that you, your family and homes be filled with the Blessings of Peace, Joy and Love. At the same time, I thank you all, most sincerely for your thoughtful prayers and support. May all my dear parishioners be over shadowed with the mighty and powerful blessings of the **Baby Jesus, the Emmanuel**.

Fr. Jacob

Pope: 'At Christmas let us think about the Holy Land'



Pope Francis has once again reiterated his closeness to all the people suffering the ongoing war between Hamas and Israel.

During an audience on Saturday with a group of actors featuring in a Living Nativity Scene at the Patriarchal Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome, he called on Christians to turn their thoughts and

prayers this Christmas to the Holy Land.

Praying for all those suffering the war

"We know the situation, caused by the war, the consequence of a conflict that has lasted for decades." he said, remarking that for Palestinians living in Bethlehem too this Christmas will be marked by suffering and grieving, with no pilgrims and celebrations.

Vatican Creche reminds us of tragedy in Holy Land

Because of the conflict in Gaza, and rising tensions also in the West Bank, in Bethlehem tourism has halted and pilgrimages have been suspended, while all public celebrations have been cancelled, resulting in further hardships for its inhabitants many of whom live on tourism and pilgrimages. "We don't want to leave them alone", said Pope Francis, urging for prayers and tangible support.

Living Nativity scenes are not mere folkloric facts

Also, its underground Chapel of the Nativity once displayed the first known nativity scene figurines, sculpted by Arnolfo di Cambio in the late 13th century for Pope Nicholas IV, who was inspired by St. Francis of Assisi, creator of the first Living Nativity in Greccio, Italy, 800 years ago.

Referring to this detail. Pope Francis remarked that living nativity scenes must not be reduced to mere folkloric facts. Their purpose, as intended by St. Francis, he said, must "be to reawaken wonder in the heart, before the mystery of God who became a child."

"Francis wanted to represent in life the birth of Jesus to inspire, in friars and in the people, emotion and tenderness towards the mystery of God born of Mary in a stable and laid in a manger. He wanted to give substance to the representation: not a painting, not statues, but people in flesh and blood, in order to highlight the reality of the incarnation."

The Christmas event: While Matthew places the birth of Jesus against the background of Herod's reign, Luke places it against the background of the Roman Empire. It is generally accepted that Jesus was born in 4 B.C. Luke begins by making a subtle contrast between Caesar Augustus who failed as an inaugurator of peace, and Jesus the Savior and bringer of peace. Both Tertullian and Justin Martyr (c. 165) state that in their time the records of the 4 B.C. census still existed along with those of 28 B.C., 8 B.C. and 14 A.D. In the Roman Empire, a census was taken periodically with the double object of assessing taxation and of discovering those who were subject to compulsory military service. Another hidden aim was to find out the true descendants of King David who had a claim to the throne as the king of the Jews. Luke's purpose in mentioning the census was to provide God's reason for, and means of, getting Mary and Joseph the roughly eighty miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David, wherein the promised heir of David was to be born, as prophesied by Micah (5:1). Bethlehem was commonly thought of as the city of David because of David's birth and childhood there. Since travellers brought their own food, the innkeeper provided only fodder for the animals and a fire for cooking along with a spot to sleep within his walls. A manger is a feeding trough (food box), and it symbolizes the sacrificial meal that Jesus becomes, which provides sustenance for the whole world. Father Raymond Brown in his masterful book on the Infancy Narratives says that these stories are *theologumena*, not so much literal history as stories with a theological point – the other gratuitous and revolutionary impact of Jesus' birth, life, and death. The important thing to remember is that they are stories of God's love and Jesus' role in history and that's what counts, not historical details.



Christmas Story

Camel on the roof of royal palace: The king of Balkh (northern Afghanistan) named Ebrahim ibn Adam was wealthy according to every earthly measure. At the same time, however, he sincerely and restlessly strove to be wealthy spiritually as well. One night the king was roused from sleep by a fearful stumping on the roof above his bed. Alarmed, he shouted: "Who's there?" "A friend," came the reply from the roof. "I've lost my camel." Perturbed by such stupidity, Ebrahim screamed: "You fool! Are you looking for a camel on the roof?" "You fool!" the voice from the roof answered. "Are you looking for God in silk clothing, and lying on a golden bed?" The story goes on, according to Jesuit theologian Walter G. Burghardt, to tell how these simple words filled the king with such terror that he arose from his sleep to become a most remarkable saint. — Every Christmas Jesus asks the same question to each one of us: "Where are you looking for Me? In the majestically adorned and illuminated cathedrals or in the stables of the poor and the needy?" Tonight's Scripture readings tell us where to look for Christ the Saviour.



SUNDAY READINGS FOR THE COMING MONTH – Year B

31st December – The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary & Joseph – Genesis 15:1-6.21:1-3, Hebrews 11:8.11-12.17-19, Luke 2:22-40

7th January – The Epiphany of the Lord – Isaiah 60:1-6, Ephesians 3:2-3.5-6, Matthew 2:1-12

14th January – 2nd Sunday Ordinary Time – Samuel 3:3-10.19, Corinthians 6:13-15.17-20, John 1:35-42

21st January – 3rd Sunday Ordinary Time - Jonah 3:1-5.10, Corinthians 7:29-31, Mark 1:14-20

28th January – 4th Sunday Ordinary Time – Deuteronomy 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 7:32-35, Mark 1:21-28



Being a Deacon is to serve, but not to be served.

In reflection, I recall that being a deacon is not a job, it is a calling. The word “deacon” comes from a Greek word meaning “servant.” I speak as the one and only deacon in our diocese when I say that, I stand ready to serve our bishop and our priests in any way they need. We were called to this vocation of service, and we hope to fulfil our duties with humble and joy-filled hearts. In other words, deacons are ordained to serve priests and assist them in their mission.

Therefore, the vocation of deacon carries the profound responsibility to pour out one’s life in service to others, just as Christ who came “not to be served, but to serve.” Thus, it is important to remember that the deacon extends the sacramental presence of Christ’s service outside of the church and into the secular world. A deacon is just as engaged in his ministry when he is at home or at work; he is a permanent and public sign of Christ the Servant, no matter where he is, or what he is doing. That being said, each deacon will collaborate with his family, his employer, his pastor, and his bishop on how to meet the needs of his ministry.

With grateful hearts we feel so humble by each member of our parish continuing to impress us with their giving nature and excitement in spreading God’s word. We couldn’t do what we do without people like you. “My wife Fania and I are so honoured to be your servants.” Remember, your prayers and support have made it possible to share God’s word and love with those in our community. So, being a deacon is to imitate and live the gospel as God call us to serve. Thanks to Fr. Jacob and our parish council, also to all our parishioners for your endless support. Let us continue to pray and serve one another, and above all to serve God through His One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church. May you all have a blessed Christmas and a New Year full of God’s grace. Love with prayers.

Iosefa Setu

Service of the Word with Holy Communion – In Balclutha, First Sunday of the month Mass is a Vigil held on the Saturday evening, at 5.30pm. **This will continue.** For those parishioners who are working and unable to attend the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Deacon Iosefa will lead a Service of the Word with Holy Communion in Balclutha on the First Sunday at 10.30am. That is for January Sunday 7th

We pray for: those recently deceased, and those whose anniversaries are at this time: **Caren Phillips, Thomas Bunbury, Marion O’Connell, Gertrude Carson, Peter Willcocks, Barbara Hugtenburg, Jean Hughes, Maureen Bowden, Andrea Donovan, Judith Michie, Ann Walker, Bill Sinclair, Lorna McLachlan.**

Message from Balclutha Parish

We continue to work on welcoming **all** to our Parish family and throughout the year we have been blessed to have different ethnicities and our Parish School leading Sunday Masses.

A highlight for us this year was Iosefa Setu being ordained as a Deacon, by Bishop Michael, in our own Parish Church. Iosefa is the first Deacon to be ordained in the South Island. It was a special and joyous occasion.

A Lenten Retreat was held, the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion were celebrated. Early in the year we held a Pastoral area Picnic and later a Shared Meal. Both were successful gatherings.

After a number of years of absence, we hosted a Prayer Service for the Combined Christian Churches of Balclutha to Pray for Peace and the Christmas Season.

After many years of waiting the Office/Parish room upgrade has finally taken place and is almost complete. We look forward to the opening in the New Year.

Thank you to everyone who has helped in any way to keep this Parish functioning. Whether it is preparation for or duties during Sunday Mass, Lay Ministers, music, formulating slide shows, administration, cup of teas, Church cleaning, maintenance, lawns, gardening etc. your role is very important and is much appreciated.

Finally, thanks to Father Jacob for his spiritual guidance and leadership. We acknowledge the challenge Father Jacob faces having to spread himself over a very large Pastoral area including two schools.

*May the miracle of Christmas
bring you great blessings
and a joyous spirit.*

Pauline Dodds,
Chairperson Parish Pastoral Council



Sinulog Festival 2024

**Come and join the Filipino
annual cultural and
religious festival**

Friday 12th January

**St Mary MacKillop
Church, Balclutha
@ 7.00pm**

Potluck event after Mass.