

Beyond 2020 Vision

A Publication of Morialta Uniting Church

December 2024

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Welcome to our December edition

Colin Cargill, Editor and Helena Begg, Publisher

This month we feature an article by Rev Dr Jonathan Barker entitled 'Christmas for the whole Year'. This is one of several reflections on Advent and Christmas.

Jan Thornton shares her memories of a Christmas Nativity Play and Ruth Dunning her memories of a visit to the White House.

There are also the usual news and information articles to read and ponder.

The **deadline for the next Vision will be 31st January 2025**. Either drop your articles in to the church office or call/email Colin on 0427 122 106 or snout-n-about@bigpond.com

Wishing you all a wonderful Christmas with many blessings in the New Year!

Helena and Colin

Christmas for the whole year

By Rev Dr Jonathan Barker

Howard Thurman's (picture right) poem, "When the song of the angels is stilled" reminds us that it is only after the birth of Jesus that the true meaning of the nativity gets to be lived. The significance of these wonderful stories is not limited to Christmas!



All the birth stories were in fact compiled well after Jesus' death in full knowledge of the liberating experience of the risen Christ. Thus, the stories of the beginnings reflect and affirm the witness of the adult Jesus and of the early church. Much is "written back" into the nativity events. I want to make four affirmations to summarise the ongoing significance of the Christmas stories.

The first affirmation is the **historical** significance of Jesus. It is no surprise that Matthew and Luke, writing long after Jesus' birth without the fact-checking facilities we have today should mix up some dates and details. For example, there was no census of the whole Roman empire ever recorded but there was a census in Judea for taxation purposes held after the date of Jesus birth in 4BCE. But the point is not whether all the facts stack up as accurately as we would insist today, but that Matthew wants to positively affirm that the child Jesus, entered into the historical process as a human being, counted in a census as one of us. As we know, the adult Jesus would eventually die with the connivance of the civil power of Rome and the religious authorities. Thus, the birth stories insist that Jesus is a player in the historical process who lived our fleshly existence and was shaped by the religious and cultural context of the first century. Yes, his life and mission are truly historical, indeed later to become the marker of what we now call the Common Era.

Second, the birth of Jesus is a **radical** event beginning with the premonitions of Mary about the destiny of her son who would eventually catalyse a reversal of fortune within the social order. There would be a power shift where the abused, forsaken, oppressed and unloved are raised up to claim their rightful place in the human family. The whole ministry of Jesus exemplified a preferential option for the excluded and marginalised, which challenged the privileged, rich and powerful to let go of their entitlements. Thus, the Jesus event

is "radical" in the original meaning of the word, that is to do with the "roots" of the tradition – its core meaning. Both Matthew and Luke inserted all the references they could think of to connect Jesus with the religious tradition. One example is the infant Jesus being linked with the Moses story. Furthermore, radicality requires the courage to make decisions such as whether the significance of Jesus is something worth staking our own lives on.



Third, Jesus' birth is of **universal** significance. The visit of the Magi from outside the Jewish tradition powerfully and symbolically casts Jesus as the one in whom all truth seekers find their journeys end. Who did Jesus live and die for? Was it just for an obscure religious elite who thought they were the chosen ones above all others? No. The full significance of Christ Jesus is for all individuals and nations. This is a bold and seemingly arrogant proposal. However, we are not talking about belonging to a particular ecclesiastical organisation which assumes universalist superiority but to a transforming grace-like experience which can happen to anyone irrespective of cultural or religious traditions.

Fourth, the birth of Jesus is **relational**. This means that the significance of Christ Jesus actually transcends history and a story of just one person. This is captured in the prologue to the gospel according to John, which begins with the claim that "In the beginning was the Word" (in Greek "Logos" can be translated as "meaning") evoking the cosmic birth story in Genesis chapter one. This cosmic drama declares all of creation is "good"- not good in the moral sense, but as a relational affirmation that all-that-is, is good. Indeed after the final scene when humans appear on the planet it is all declared to be "very good." A "yes" is stamped on all creation. It is, in other words, relational. What's the connection with Jesus? While grounded in history, this Jesus in whom God is well pleased, is not so much one to be "believed in" but is an expression of ultimate meaning, of a "yes" that transcends time, history, culture and religion. The theologian Elizabeth Johnson uses the term "deep incarnation" to signify that the Word, enters into solidarity not only with all humanity but also with all of creation.

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Christmas for the whole year

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How then do we encounter this Jesus in our experience? Firstly, it is within our personal **history**, in moments when we are made aware of our human failings; when, despite all, we too can accept the fact that we are the dwelling place of divine grace. To say yes (an act of faith) to our acceptance is to make the most **radical** decision of our lives. This becomes a Christ Event in our own lives. We then perceive that all other humans are members of the one human **universal** family. We are then drawn into a new **relationship** with the whole cosmos, ready to work towards restoring a just balance in a world of social and ecological distortions empowered by the revolutionary vision of a more compassionate and equitable society. Then the work of Christmas has truly begun.

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost, to heal the broken,
To feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.*

Howard Thurman

Friendship Group

From Joan Wagner

At our November meeting, after a cuppa, our AGM was held to elect the next year's leaders. Margaret Clogg reminded us about the wonderful range of activities we shared this year. There were outings for lunch, visits to interesting places, and, in the hall, quizzes, art, wreath-making and visits from Hearing Dogs and more.



Our speaker for November was Margaret Cargill sharing overwhelming pictures and reminiscences of her 75th birthday to Europe with her children and to the old spa town of Vichy in southern France. It was wonderful to see her catch-up with son Thomas and wife and daughter Helen and partner as they accompanied her on tours and shared a celebratory birthday meal with her. On this very hot morning in our cool hall we went on an overwhelming journey to see majestic mountains in Switzerland and visit little villages in France with spectacular architecture going back to the 1800s. We felt this must have been a special blessing to Margaret and in sharing it we had a wonderful experience too. Thanks again Margaret.

The paraments for Advent - purple

Purple is the traditional colour for Advent. It represents preparation, repentance, humility and penance. It is used during Lent as well as Advent. While Advent and Lent are quite different and distinctive in feel, both are seasons of hope and anticipation. (Blue, which we used in 2023, is an alternative to purple for Advent.)



A Christmas star and the Easter cross are super-imposed on the communion table. At the centre sits a pictorial representation of our church in its urban environment, endeavouring to live out the heart of the gospel .

On the lectern the traditional symbol of hope, the rainbow, arches against a sky bright with water droplets.

The paraments for Christmas - white

White represents joy and purity of soul. It is used on Christmas Day, Easter Day and baptismal days, and so here we celebrate new life.

On the communion table we see an egg, the ancient symbol of life, exploding with energy and brilliant light, and on the lectern, a candle represents Christ, the Light of the World and the source of true life.





Old memories at Christmas

From Jan Thornton

I always look forward to the Festive Season. Part of that enjoyment is in witnessing the way church services remind us of Advent. This first season of the church year begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and is for preparation and expectation.

As a child, I looked forward to seeing Nativity plays performed, both at school and church. They were never close to perfection, but the sheer passion with which we approached the events made it an exciting forerunner to Christmas Day itself. Yes, we all looked forward to our gifts on Christmas morning, but it seemed impossible to enjoy them without understanding what the Nativity was all about.

We sang the same carols every year and loved each one. Today, I really miss seeing a Nativity play acted out in the traditional fashion, including all the beautiful songs that only soar heavenward when sung by children's voices. As children, we knew singing "Away in A Manger" was the moment for us to concentrate on the straw-filled crib, holding the infant Jesus.

I have a photograph taken in our third year at school, when my friends and I were the stars of the Nativity play. I should have been the Angel Gabriel, but because of illness I was relegated to the minor part of angel trumpeter.

Christine was a demure angel faithfully attending the crib, and Maureen, the devoted Virgin Mary. Each child, surrounded by the Magi, shepherds, and Joseph, concentrated on that crude little manger in earnest. We were seven years old, but our teachers had instilled in us the responsibility for projecting majestic piety into our play-acting. Though our rehearsals were marked with tears and discord, the actual event was breathtaking, showing a reverence that's palpable, even in my old photograph.

Our beautiful, wise and poised Maureen died two years ago. She epitomised what the Virgin Mary might have been, and our teachers must have recognised her dignity. But Christine and I, though separated by thousands of miles, remain firm friends, and when we meet, often laugh about the reason I was relegated to trumpeter – and the emotions it produced in one intractably stubborn little girl. One side of my face had suddenly become immensely swollen, despite painful, penicillin injections (a diagnosis was never made) and our headmistress decided she didn't want a lop-sided Angel Gabriel dominating her play. Symmetry was required!

Consequently, Rita Myatt (I'll never forget that name) was promoted to wear my beautiful, golden garb and given my BIG speaking part. I was assigned Rita's trumpet (swollen side of face exposed to the audience so it looked as if I was blowing my cheeks out) and her simple white dress – with smaller wings than Gabriel's!

I wasn't happy to have my moment of stardom taken from me. However, decisions made that day, have provided indelible memories to enjoy, as every Christmas approaches.

Always look on the bright side of life!

Christmas points us beyond the birth of Jesus

Adapted from an article by Andrew Lang on Patheos Website

After we come down from the Christmas high and realize there is cleaning and grocery shopping to be done, there is a question of how we might carry the energy of Christmas with us forward into the new year.

When we celebrate Christmas as only the birthday of Jesus, it can become tempting to treat the next day as any other day. But Christmas isn't just about one baby's birth in Palestine two thousand years ago; it is urging us to continually recognize the presence of the Divine all around us.



Howard Thurman, an influential Christian mystic, speaks of the power behind this universal incarnation when he writes:

"The symbol of Christmas – what is it? It is the rainbow

arched over the roof of the sky when the clouds are heavy with foreboding. It is the cry of life in the newborn babe

when, forced from its mother's nest, it claims its right to live. It is the brooding Presence of the Eternal Spirit making crooked paths straight, rough places smooth, tired hearts refreshed, dead hopes stir with newness of life. It is the promise of tomorrow at the close of every day, the movement of life in defiance of death, and the assurance that love is sturdier than hate, that right is more confident than wrong, that good is more permanent than evil." (*The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations*, 1973)

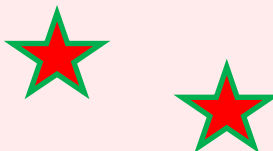
I love the image of the "brooding Presence of the Eternal Spirit," constantly operating in us and around us to bring the world closer to wholeness and justice. For me, that's a more realistic symbol of Christmas than a baby born 2000 years ago.

But it we don't stop there, if we move beyond the baby and into what it really means for the Divine to be present within our Universe in an intimately personal way, we might have not just a radical story, but an embodied story that each of us are already in the midst of: a story inviting us into recognizing and honouring the Divine energy already moving through us.

Andrew Lang leads workshops on contemplative spirituality and community development

MERRY MAGILL MARKET

Many thanks to all who contributed to the success of our market this year—it was a great community event and boosted our church funds, thanks to all your efforts in the lead up, on the day and afterwards!



Advent

Advent means “arrival” and signifies the start of an event or the arrival of a person. In Christian communities around the world, Advent refers to a four-week season of remembering and celebrating the arrival of Jesus on earth. Synonyms include coming; approach; appearance; arrival; entrance; onset; occurrence; visitation.

The White House

Contributed by Ruth Dunning

The recent American presidential election brought back memories of my visit with Bruce and my sister to Washington. Although that was many years ago, my memories are still vivid with the aid of my typed detailed record.

Washington, built on swampland, is a Mecca of museums, marble monuments and historic sites. The Capitol is the tallest building – no skyscrapers are allowed to be built and there is no overhead wiring. We loved the wide thoroughfares with their profusion of bordering shade trees.

We visited the White House which on the day of Bruce’s 53rd birthday. We had celebrated with a special dinner the evening before. The White House has 132 rooms and built in 1793 is the oldest public building in Washington. In the gift shop I bought the book “The First Ladies” which was very informative and I laughed at some of the old-fashioned language used.

Each of the rooms has a distinctive décor. In the roped off China Room, where the White House treasures are displayed, we could see a striking full-length portrait of Mrs. Calvin Coolidge dressed in red. “In 1931 she was voted one of America’s twelve greatest living women”.

In the beautiful East Room decorated in white and gold, and the scene of many splendid occasions, are full length portraits of both George and Martha Washington. Martha was known to be “a gracious hostess and a most becoming pleasantness sat upon her countenance.”

Both the Green Room and the Red Room were delightful, the former with wall coverings of moss green watered silk and the latter with wall coverings of a red twill satin fabric. Here

Rutherford Hayes took his oath of office in 1872 whilst “the serene and beautiful face of his watching wife, Lucy, impressed even cynical journalists”.

Next we stood in the famous oval shaped Blue Room – simple yet stunning. Here the White House’s first wedding took place in 1861 between President Cleveland and Francis Folsom.

Lastly the State Dining Room which seats 140 people. A portrait of Abraham Lincoln hangs over the mantelpiece. Lincoln said of his wife, Mary, “I fell in love with her, and what is more, I have never fallen out.” The official White House china was on display – white with a tangerine border edged in gold.

In 1800, in a cold room of the unfinished White House, President John Adams, who was first to occupy the White house, wrote, “I pray heaven bestow the best of blessings on this House and all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof”! Today those sentences can be seen carved on the marble mantel of the State Dining Room. They might serve as a gentle reminder to President Trump, and those who follow him, of the requirements of their office.



John Wilton (1930 – 2024)

Adapted from the family eulogy by the Editor

John and his wife Heather were much respected and loved members of MUC during the 1970s and 80s. His funeral was held in the Angaston UC on Monday 28th October.

John was highly sensitive and deeply spiritual with a unique and rather complex perspective on the world. He had a quirky sense of humour and loved the ‘Goon Show’ and ‘Get Smart’. When John told you about a book he had been reading – it was complete – you no longer needed to read it.

His most enjoyable period of work was teaching the Fijian Vuli Italata, theological students in the 1960s. He taught them their exegesis subjects, that is, the interpretations and origins of a scriptural text. His daughters explained it as “teaching Greek, Hebrew and German to the Fijian students.”

His relationship with and understanding of God evolved and developed through his scientific training. His concept of God

seemed to be that of “the great consciousness” and the kingdom of heaven a Christian phrase for the “development of consciousness.”

He did not believe in an interventionist God. He believed the Grace of God enabled the freedom to choose. Whilst he believed there is no punishment in God, there are sanctions we need to evolve through, particularly when we stray from the natural order. Global warming would be a classic example.

He believed there was no selfishness in God, but instead there was life, love compassion, kindness, patience, and tenderness. These in turn were the principles that shaped his life choices.

John was blessed with Heather who accepted unconditionally his sensitivity, complex intellect, and spiritual journey on this earth.

An apt benediction is “May the subatomic particles of your soul meet within the Great Consciousness, that is the essence of God.”

Otin Taai* +20

From *Uniting World*

Some of you have commented on the banner over the entrance to the church. It is part of MUC's response to a call from our Pacific Islander sisters and brothers .



– Editor

20 years ago in March 2004, church leaders from across the Pacific gathered in Kiribati to lead a vital consultation on climate change, releasing the powerful *Otin Taai* Declaration, which committed their churches to urgent action and called on Christians throughout the world to act in solidarity.

To mark 20 years since *Otin Taai*, the Pacific Conference of Churches hosted the *Otin Taai* +20 Conference to take stock of the impacts of climate change, the lack of an appropriate collective global response, and to discern how best to work together on the issue into the future.

UnitingWorld Head of Programs Peter Keegan attended the event on behalf of the Uniting Church in Australia along with Rev. Alimoni Taumoepeau from the UCA Synod of NSW & ACT.

Peter shared: “As we knelt to pray on muddy sands beside seawaters that just a generation ago had been fertile and productive land, the reality was starkly evident before us. What was a prophetic warning in the *OtinTaai* Declaration 20 years ago is today a reality. And it is a reality that is impacting all of the people and creatures of the earth.”

Otin Taai +20 was another powerful time of sharing about the impacts of climate change on people, communities and biodiversity across the region, and resulted in the Tuakoi 'lei**

Declaration (read it at www.unitingworld.org.au/tuakoilei)

“God has called creation out of the chaos of ocean covered earth, yet the actions of fossil fuelled greed, selfishness and apathy, manifested as extractive industries and economic globalization are driving us back to chaos as we experience the ocean rising to reclaim the earth, our common home. We call the world to embody neighbourly love, compassion and hope, which are needed more than ever to turn the tide for climate and ecological justice. ”

**Otin Taai* is the iKiribati phrase for “sunrise”

** Tuakoi 'lei - translated from the Tuvaluan phrase for “good neighbour” or “loving neighbour”

The Christmas Bowl

Act for peace this Christmas and celebrate 75 years of acting for peace in the world together!

For 75 years, church communities like ours, have been giving hope to displaced families through the Christmas Bowl appeal. Funds raised are invested in life changing support programs around the globe that empower people to find safety in exile and rebuild their lives.

From our church community to theirs, our **Christmas Bowl** gifts help bring the peace that comes with having a safe place to belong, to those who need it most. Give because everyone deserves to have a safe place to belong.

“The evangel is complete only when the action of the gospel matches the message of the gospel.” – Rev. Frank Byatt, 1954.

Please join in praying and acting for peace in the world as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Christmas Bowl.



Jesu lover of my soul

From ‘Stories of Famous Hymns’ by G.A. Leask M.A.
– first published 1913 – loaned by Julie Lomman

Jesu, lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly...

The finest story ever told in connection with this famous hymn comes from America after the Civil War. An excursion steamer was sailing down the Potomac in America. It was evening, and a number of people were on deck listening to the rendering of familiar hymns by a gentleman on board. He had just concluded singing *Jesu, lover of my soul*, when a passenger made his way from the outskirts of the crowd and accosted the singer. “Beg your pardon, stranger,” he said, “but were you actively engaged in the late war?” “Yes, sir,” was the reply. “I was fighting under General Grant.” “Well,” the first speaker continued, with something like a sigh, “I did my fighting on the other side, but I think – indeed, am quite sure – I was near you one bright night eighteen years ago this very month. It was such a night as this. If I am not mistaken, you were on sentry duty. We of the South had sharp business on hand, and you

were one of the enemy. I crept near your post of duty, my murderous weapon in my hand; the shadows hid me. Your beat led you out into the clear light. As you paced back and forth, you were humming the tune of the hymn you have just sung. I raised my gun and aimed at your heart, and I had been selected by our commander for the work because I was a sure shot. Then upon the night floated the words – *Cover my defenceless head, with the shadow of thy wing.*

Your prayer was answered. I couldn't fire after that. And there was no attack made upon your camp that night. I felt sure, when I heard you sing this evening, that you were the man whose life I was spared from taking.” Grasping the hand of the Southerner, the singer said, with much emotion, “I remember the night very well, and distinctly the feeling of depression and loneliness with which I went forth to my duty. I knew my post was one of great danger and I was more dejected than I remember to have been at any other time during my active service. I paced my lonely beat thinking of home and friends and all that life holds dear. Then the thought of God's care for all that He has created came to me with peculiar force. So I sang the prayer of my heart, and ceased to feel alone. How the prayer was answered I never knew until this evening.”



Community Building & Fundraising Report for 2024

In addition to our fundraisers, we enjoyed Guess Who's Coming to Lunch in September, and a couple of community lunches associated with meetings of the congregation.

The committee wish to thank everyone who participated in this year's events, especially those who volunteered to help achieve this result.

If you'd like to suggest events for next year please talk to Colin, Carole, Judith or Helena.

Month	Event	Amount (\$)
June	Pop-up stall	585.00
July	Little Para Singers	587.00
	Trading table	135.00
August	Musical clips and lunch	574.00
October	AMVC concert	656.00
	Raffle	161.00
November	Market	9,000 ++
TOTAL		11,698.00 ++

Celebrating an eternal Advent

Richard Rohr - Center for Action and Contemplation

In the first 1200 years of Christianity, the greatest feast was Easter with the high holy days of Holy Week leading up to the celebration of the resurrection of Christ. But in the 13th century, a new person entered the scene: Francis of Assisi felt we didn't need to wait for God to love us through the cross and resurrection. Francis intuited that the whole thing started with incarnate love, and he popularized what we now take for granted as Christmas, which for many became the greater Christian feast. The Franciscans popularized Christmas. Maybe their intuition was correct.

Francis realized that if God had become flesh – taken on materiality, physicality, humanity – then we didn't have to wait for Good Friday and Easter to “solve the problem” of human sin; the problem was solved from the beginning. It makes sense that Christmas became the great celebratory feast of Christians because it basically says that it's good to be human, it's good to be on this earth, it's good to be flesh, it's good to have emotions. We don't need to be ashamed of any of this. God loves matter and physicality.

With that insight, it's no wonder Francis went wild over Christmas! Francis believed that every tree should be decorated with lights to show their true status as God's creations! And that's exactly what we still do 800 years later.

Remember, when we speak of Advent or preparing for Christmas, we're not just talking about waiting for the little baby Jesus to be born. That already happened 2,000 years ago. In fact, we're welcoming the Universal Christ, the Cosmic Christ, the Christ that is forever being born in the human soul and into history.



And believe me, we do have to make room, because right now there is no room in the inn for such a mystery. We see things pretty much in their materiality, but we don't see the light shining through. We don't see the incarnate spirit that is hidden inside of everything material.

The early Eastern Church, which too few people in 'Western' countries are familiar with, made it very clear that the incarnation was a universal principle. Incarnation meant not just that God became Jesus; God said yes to the material universe. God said yes to physicality. Eastern Christianity understands the mystery of incarnation in the universal sense. So it is always Advent.

We're always waiting to see spirit revealing itself through matter. We're always waiting for matter to become a new form in which spirit is revealed. Whenever that happens, we're celebrating Christmas. The gifts of incarnation just keep coming. Perhaps this is enlightenment.

You and poetry

The difference between poetry and you is that you look in the mirror and say, “I am getting old,” but Shakespeare looks in the mirror and says, “Devouring Time, blunt thou thy lion's paws.”
(Jim Harrison, contributed by Rev Jenny Swanbury)

We say tea and you say cha

Most of the world uses the same two words for tea:

One variation is the one used in English (tea), French (thé), Spanish (té) and Dutch (thee). The other is a variation of chá (in Mandarin and Cantonese), such as chai in Hindi, shay in Arabic and chay in Russian.

Both versions come from China – but how they spread around the world offers a clear picture of how globalization worked before “globalization” was a term anybody used. The words that sound like “cha” spread across land, along the Silk Road. The “tea” like phrasings spread over water, by Dutch traders bringing the novel leaves back to Europe.



Congratulations...

... to Cynthia who recently celebrated her 80th birthday in grand style!



Celebrate Christmas at Morialta!

Blue Christmas

7.00pm, Monday 16th December

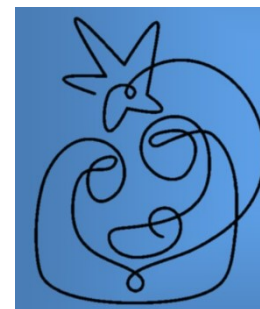
Christmas Eve

7.00pm, Tuesday 24th December

Christmas Day

9.30am, Wednesday 25th December

Celebrating the Symbols of Christmas



Slava Christmas Carol Concert Ukrainian Aid Fundraiser

7pm on Friday 13th December
at the Concordia College Chapel, Highgate

Ukrainian Saint Mykolay (Saint Nicholas)
will make an appearance,
and there will be traditional
Ukrainian sweets and souvenirs for sale.

General Admission \$20, children under 14 free (no gift)
or \$15 (with gift included)

Book on <https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1315872> or purchase tickets in the foyer on the night

Is your desk too cluttered?

Last Christmas, grandpa was feeling his age and found that shopping for Christmas gifts had become too difficult. So he decided to send checks to everyone instead. In each card he wrote, "Buy your own present!" and mailed them early.

He enjoyed the usual flurry of family festivities, and it was only after the holiday that he noticed that he had received very few cards in return. Puzzled over this, he went into his study, intending to write to a couple of his relatives and ask what had happened.

It was then, as he cleared off his cluttered desk, that he got his answer. Under a stack of papers, he was horrified to find the gift checks which he had forgotten to enclose with the cards!



The Moderator's Christmas message

This year the Moderator's Christmas message focuses on the themes 'We love, because God first loved us' (1 John 4:19) and 'Through their eyes'. With an emphasis on love, hope, peace and joy, the Moderator urges us all to consider these words throughout all of our lives. He also encourages us to be 'peacemakers', acknowledging that we are experiencing increased conflict and war across the world. The full video is now available on the Synod website at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UntY4vtzLnk>

Merry Christmas - Happy Holidays!

Adapted from a post by
Rev. Irene Monroe



According to polling, if you say "Merry Christmas," you insult liberal-progressives, and if you say "Happy Holidays", you vex conservatives. It seems that many believe there is an ongoing war on Christmas. The truth is, Muslims, secular progressives, Jews, and atheists have never been the folks trying to abolish Christmas. They all tend to celebrate the diversity of the celebration. [In fact if you visit the capital of the world's largest Islamic country in December, the celebration of Christmas rivals any major western city. Ed]

The Christmas central message is embracing and celebrating human differences and diversity. And it is with this message that I know all people – religious and non-religious, straight and LGBTQ+, black and white – can be included to enjoy and to celebrate and acknowledge this season with one simple greeting.

Wishing you Happy Holidays with love and many blessings in the New Year!