

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Midnight Mass – St George’s Cathedral
24 December 2012

Isaiah 9: 2-7
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-20

The angel said ‘Do not be afraid; for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour who is Christ, the Lord!’

A blessed, happy Christmas to you all!

Dean Michael – happy Christmas to you, your clergy colleagues and staff, and to all of you who contribute to the life of the Cathedral through the year.

Thank you everyone – this beautiful place of holy worship is a wonderful gift to us, each Christmas, and throughout the year.

Dean Michael – let me also congratulate you and Bonita, on the celebration of your 28th wedding anniversary last Saturday! May God grant you many more happy years together.

The angel said ‘Do not be afraid – I am bringing you good news.’

What is good news for us?

Well, one piece of good news is that, to nobody’s great surprise, the world did not end last Friday! [*Put down ‘The end is nigh’ banner*]

The general response was for everyone to just carry on – business as usual.

Yet perhaps you saw the picture that was going the rounds on Facebook – a small grubby child, in tattered clothes, clutching a piece of bread in a dirty little hand, and looking with big eyes at the camera.

The caption said ‘I’m not afraid the world will end in 2012: I’m afraid it will carry on with nothing changing.’

There is a lot we’d like to change – a lot we need to change.

2012 has been a hard year, in many ways – we can look back on the Limpopo text-book fiasco; the Marikana shootings; the Cape farm workers’ strikes.

Farther afield, there is the continuing terrible conflict in the DRC; the ongoing struggle to secure lasting peace in Southern Sudan; and, of course, the tragic massacre at Sandy Hook school in Newtown, Connecticut.

More generally, we want to see change in the ongoing issues of poverty, unemployment, inadequate health care and education, corruption and inefficiency, and environmental degradation.

President Zuma may have been re-elected President of the ANC – but we say to our politicians and all in positions of leadership and influence, it cannot be 'business as usual'.

There has to be a greater urgency, a deeper commitment, to doing more and doing it better.

Instead of the end of the world, we need a new beginning.

And this, of course, is the message of Christmas.

Jesus' birth invites us to see the world as changed into a different place, full of new and hope-filled possibilities.

We often describe the end of the world as 'apocalypse'.

But the word apocalypse actually means 'revelation'.

Therefore, Christmas is the true apocalypse, this December – and every December. [*Put down the 'The Beginning is nigh' banner*]

Christmas, Christ's birth, is God's revelation of God's true self, in human form.

Christmas is God's declaration that we are not created by a distant deity who sits on a remote cloud issuing condemnations upon our fallibility.

It is the bold expression that God is more than on our side: God is with us.

God in Jesus Christ experiences what it is to be human, with all life brings, its joys and disappointments, friendships and betrayal.

He knows the turbulence of adolescence, and the challenges of adult responsibility. He knows what it feels like to face mortality.

The child in the manger becomes the man on the cross, who puts death to death, rising with a promise of eternal life.

Christmas says it is no longer 'business as usual'.

Christmas says God loves us so much that he willingly sacrifices himself so that we can have what we most need in life.

And I don't mean ipads or flat-screen TVs!

Our greatest need is for forgiveness for our failings, healing of our brokenness, comfort in our sorrows, fresh hope and encouragement in all we encounter, strength to persevere in doing the right thing.

We need the knowledge that God will always be Emmanuel, (literally 'God with us'), helping us grow in love, in all that is good, every step of the way until we find our heavenly home.

We need to know God's new beginning, always available, always fresh, in our own lives – and his promises of life and love triumphing over death and destruction.

Confident of this, let us pray for God's great light shining wherever people walk in darkness, and for the Prince of Peace to reign in justice: in the DRC, in Southern Sudan – wherever conflict and strife has a hold –in Syria, in Egypt, in Israel and Palestine, the birthday place of our Lord and the Holy basin for Abrahamic faiths

Confident of this, let us pray for ourselves, that God, incarnate through the Christ-child, may fill our own lives, our homes, our families, with his gifts of love and inner peace – so that they may dwell within us; and so that we too may be channels of love and peace in God's world.

Confident of all that Christmas brings, let us spare a special prayer for God's full healing of Madiba. This is the prayer that is being used around the world for him, and for Me Graça, at this time:

At Advent and Christmas, we sing and pray, O come, O come Emmanuel.
We ask now, for Emmanuel, God with us, to be with Madiba and Me Graça
Come Emmanuel and release our Madiba from the scourge of ill health;
Come Emmanuel and offer Madiba everlasting healing;
You are a God who knows vulnerability, weakness and frailty,
You are Lord of Lords, King of Kings, Lord of life and death,
Your power sustains us in life and death.

May your arms of love, stretched wide on the cross for us,
Now enfold Madiba, and Graça, with compassion, comfort and
the conviction that you will never forsake them but that
you will grant Madiba eternal healing and relief from pain and suffering.

And may your blessing rest upon Madiba now and always. Amen.

May God's blessing rest upon all of you also: may the eagerness of the shepherds, the joy of the angels, the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Joseph and Mary, and the peace of the Christ-child be yours, this Christmas, and always. Amen.