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## **Brief Christmas message from Bishop Mark Calder**

Anglican Diocese of Bathurst – covering central and western New South Wales

Can you imagine the conversation Mary had to have with Joseph?

“Joseph – we need to talk”. (Long pause while she gathers the courage.) “I’m pregnant”.

What a shock! Mary knew she hadn’t slept with anyone. Joseph knew it wasn’t him!

Joseph was a good guy and decided not to make a fuss but simply walk away.

But God had other plans.

“What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit”, an angel told Joseph in a dream. What a dream!! There would have been comfort in that dream – Mary had not been sleeping around. But confusion too – whatever does “conceived by the Holy Spirit” mean?

Put simply, it means that in this baby, God was stepping into our world. He had an earthly mother, but a heavenly Father. God turned up – not in a majestic palace – but as a small, vulnerable baby, laid in a food trough and needing his nappy changed. Astonishing!

The two names given to this boy help us understand something of the significance of his birth.

The first: ‘Jesus’. It means ‘God saves’. Saves from what? The angel explained to Joseph, “You are to give him the name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins”. “Sins” is not a word we use today. Ultimately it means shutting God out and living as if he doesn’t exist or doesn’t matter. That attitude breaks our relationship with God. Jesus’ whole mission was to mend that relationship. By his life, death and resurrection, he makes it possible for anyone, should they want to, to be forgiven and come back into relationship with him, now and forever. That is pretty wonderful and overwhelmingly generous.

The second name: ‘Immanuel’. It means ‘God with us’. “What if God was one of us?”, Joan Osborne mused in her hit song. Christmas reminds us that God did in fact turn up as one of us. That means he gets us. He knows life! And he’s still with us – by his Spirit. In all our joys and laughter. In all our pain and grief. God is with us! This too is pretty wonderful.

COVID may dent our plans and indeed may have caused us grief this year.

But it is not so powerful that it can change the meaning of Christmas.

God saves. God with us. Revel and enjoy. (Even if your plans have had to change.)

Watch our traditional Christmas service here: <https://tinyurl.com/trad-service>

Watch our more contemporary service here: <https://tinyurl.com/mod-service>