

Think big, embrace Christ's inclusive vision

A much-loved Christmas hymn proclaims: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king." In these words, which reflect the Bible's revelation, God tells us whom he loves: everyone.

It is, as the angel tells the shepherds, news that should bring great joy to all.

That Christmas message of God's love and generosity stands in stark contrast to one of the great problems of human nature, our tendency to tribalism. As humans, we easily identify with our in-group, whether defined by nation, race, religion or some other source of identity. This is a problem because it excludes others; all those who do not belong to our in-group. We see this in the so-called identity politics that seem to have swept up so many people in recent years.

But God does not make distinctions based on ethnicity or citizenship. He is the Creator of all. And Jesus made the consequences of that explicit in the parable of the Good Samaritan and other teachings. In doing so, he was confronting some of the prejudices of his society, and most other societies.

That refusal to think small, of course, must be the model for those of us who follow Jesus. We seek to emulate, as far as possible, his example.

Today in Australia, as in much of the world, people are looking to simplify the factors that make up who they are. Sadly, all too often, this is done by defining themselves in contrast to other people who may then be rejected as outsiders. The gospel call that Jesus ushers in at Christmas is to reject that small, stunted identity, and to expand it to something larger, something more generous, something more loving. We love because we have received love. We love because God first loved us.

That infant, helpless in the manger on the first Christmas morning, shows the depth and the breadth of God's love. He lives the life that reveals God's nature to us and dies the death that provides our redemption and salvation.

God's love in the Christ child is for "all people". The Christmas story challenges us to adopt that bigger vision, having God's heart, and showing his love to others, whether part of our "in-group" or not.

The Incarnation, where God takes on human flesh in the person of Jesus, is the living, beating heart of our faith. It is also the heart of this bigger, inclusive, loving identity that God has given to us. God's action at Christmas was to awaken this truth within us through the birth of his Son.

Have a blessed and holy Christmas.

To view the Archbishop's Christmas message on YouTube, visit
<https://youtu.be/x1cWbRjkrGQ>