



Christmas Day

Lighting the way for shattered families in Zimbabwe

Christmas Bowl

How can we share God's divine light with those who are struggling most on our Earth? In Zimbabwe, the coronavirus has left people already devastated by drought, disaster and inflation struggling to feed their children. Yet simply by sharing your blessings this Christmas Bowl, you can help families survive and stay resilient.

When Martha's crops failed in Zimbabwe's crippling drought, she had no food for her three children. She sold her cattle in the hope of buying maize meal for her family. But with widespread food shortages, Martha often returned from the shops empty handed.

There was no food – and not enough money to send her twin daughters to school. Martha said:

"This really worries me. If my children don't go to school they may get married at an early age especially girls. I wish them a good education and a good job and to lead a better way of life."

People like Martha were already in a desperate situation. Now COVID-19 threatens them with catastrophe. Zimbabwe's lockdown has helped slow the spread of the virus but has also closed local markets, disrupted food aid and forced millions out of work. Worryingly, most families don't even have the clean water they need to stop the spread of the virus.

Since the crisis began Act for Peace's local partner has been distributing food rations, soap, clean water and vital health information. With your kind help, they're now supporting communities to grow their own food so they can get through this crisis – and towards a more secure future.



The people of Zimbabwe are incredibly resourceful, but they urgently need more help to make it through this dark and difficult time. Through your gift this Christmas Bowl, you will bring them lifesaving relief.

Martha is proof of what is possible when you share your own love and light with those in need. Caring supporters like you helped bring her the tools and training to become a conservation farmer. Today, she can grow enough food to feed her family – and has faith they will survive through this pandemic.

Please give again this Christmas Bowl, and show our sisters and brothers in Zimbabwe that Christ's light can transform even the toughest of circumstances.



Sermon starter

Today, on Christmas Day, there is a strong note of universality in the lessons from scripture.

When we hear the proclamation, known to many of us in the way it was set to music in Handel's Messiah, that "a child has been born to us", we know that the "us" in the lesson is as wide and as broad an "us" as is possible.

When the angels tell the shepherds about "good news of great joy for all people", the "all" is particularly significant. The "good news of great joy" is not confined to particularly religious people, or particularly moral people, or particularly intelligent people, or people of your own cultural group ... but to all people. God's compassion is universal.

In the famous "Christmas dinner" episode of The Vicar of Dibley, Geraldine managed to accept four dinner invitations on Christmas Day out of her desire to express compassion to a number of different friends who would be otherwise dining alone. In this case, practical and universal compassion equalled serious indigestion.

The abundance found in most western nations – both at this season and throughout the year – is not the experience of most of humanity. For the people of Zimbabwe, living through successive waves of drought, crop failures, economic collapse, and now COVID-19, the reality is one of scarcity. Through the Christmas Bowl, we can stand alongside the people of Zimbabwe as they seek to meet each other's basic needs.

Liturgy

Bible readings

- **Isaiah 9:2-7:** Anticipating the light which shines in the darkness and the birth of the one who will establish justice and bring peace
- **Psalms 96:** All peoples of the earth and all of creation join in praise to God: looking in expectation to the coming of the King who judges the nations of the world with equity
- **Titus 2:11-14:** God's grace and gift of salvation calls us to grace-filled lives as we wait for Christ's glorious appearing.
- **Luke 2:1-14, (15-20):** God's chosen One laid in a manger as shepherds hear angels announcing news of great joy



Christmas Bowl

Call to Worship

We gather in the name of the One called Emmanuel, God with us!
We praise you Jesus, Son of God - yet born of Mary.

Eternal Word - yet a child without speech.

Clothed in glory - yet wrapped in swaddling bands.

Lord of heaven and earth - yet laid in a manger.

Beloved child of God we celebrate your birth this day.

The Wisdom of the Wonderful Counsellor, the Strength of the Mighty God and Everlasting Father, and the peace of the Prince of Peace be with you! **And also with you!**

Prayers of Intercession

Child of Bethlehem,
You chose to lay aside your glory born among us in simplicity and poverty, lowliness and humility.
We kneel at the manger and put our faith in you.

Where peace is difficult to achieve, when hopes are dashed,
when joy is stolen, or love withheld,
may your abiding presence bring light in the darkness.

Child of Bethlehem, we pray for all children especially those born in poverty and vulnerability.

We particularly remember the people of Zimbabwe for whom the road to recovery is long and hard.

Strengthen those facing illness and those who have lost loved ones because of Aids and COVID-19

Be with those living on the margins because of poverty or exclusion, comfort families facing uncertainty and those seeking safety.

Grant your light to shine on your people of Zimbabwe. Amen.

Dedication of the Offering

Unpredictable God, You come in surprising ways.

In actions so unexpected.

Who would have thought that the King of the Universe would make His home

among us?

Yet it is so!

Who would have guessed that God would come as a tiny babe into our world?

Yet it is so!

And the world has never been the same since your coming.

For this gift of our Saviour we would give you the wonder of our minds and the gratitude of our hearts.

Be born not only in a stable long ago but in our hearts today.

Thank you God for this opportunity to support the Christmas Bowl Appeal.

Use the gifts we offer to bring your liberating love to the lives of many. Amen.

Sending Out

Bethlehem is the beginning not the end of our journey with Christ!

As you leave this place may we take with us the joy of Mary, the dreams of Joseph, the wonder of the shepherds, and the song of the angels.

To God be glory and praise now and forever!

In the birth of Jesus God has provided the world with a great and guiding light

May the blessing of Christmas enable us to be a blessing to others.

We go from here with the light of Christ shining in our hearts. Amen

Lighting of the Advent Candle (Light)

The light of Christ has come into the world. Badayala DjesuChristkuny bilin bunan dhiyal munatha'jur.

'Aboriginal people carry sacred stories that tell of the coming of light into the world. Today we give thanks that Christ is born into our world.' - Maratja Dhamarrandji
God overcomes our darkness.

Thank you God, for the gift of light!

Loving God, guide our feet to the stable that in faith we would kneel at the manger in Bethlehem.

Thank you for the gifts of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love that are ours this day. Amen.



National Council of
Churches in Australia

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