

# Holy Spirit Province

## PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

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### **JESUS, THE BRIGHT LIGHT OF GOD IN OUR DARKNESS**

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There are some valleys in the Swiss Alps that are so deep, that in the middle of winter the rays of the sun don't penetrate for days, and sometimes even for weeks. For the people who live in those valleys, life is often experienced as one long night. This is particularly depressing for the children there. So much so that when one day a ray of sunshine shone in a classroom after nine days of darkness, the children jumped on to their desks and shouted for joy.

The precious light of day reminds us of Jesus 'the light of the world' (John 9:2). It's as true as it ever was, that in Jesus, 'the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light' (Isaiah 9:2: cf. Matthew 4:16). You and I are among those favoured people. The light of his blessings started with our Baptism, which was once known as 'The Enlightenment'. Ever since Jesus has been shining on us his light of faith, his light of hope, and his light of love.

The beginning, the dawn of the bright rays of his powerful influence have been traced by Matthew in today's gospel to his move from his hometown of Nazareth to that of Capernaum on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee. There, in that semi-pagan district, he begins his public ministry as the Light of God, which Matthew sums up in this single sentence: 'From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near"' (4:17). What Jesus is saying is that the time has arrived for God to come out of the shadows and darkness surrounding Godself, and to demonstrate through Jesus just how God is our King. Jesus is implying: 'To know what kind of King God is, just look at me. See what I do. Hear what I say. Notice the kind of person I am. Then you will discover that the God I represent, the God I bring to you, is not a God who rules in fear. No, your God and mine is a God who leads and guides with gentleness, with affection, with patience, and with compassion.'

Everything, in fact, that we can say about Jesus the man we can say about God, about God who is in Jesus, about God who is one with Jesus. Jesus is warm and friendly. So is God. Jesus is honest and truthful. So is God. Jesus is loyal and faithful. So is God. Jesus is welcoming and forgiving. So is God. Jesus is unselfish and generous. So is God. Jesus is kind and loving. So is God. Jesus is accepting and caring. So is God. Jesus lays down his life for others. So does God in Jesus. In a nutshell, Jesus is the human face of God, God's enlightening 'good news' in person, speaking for God and acting for God.

Jesus is the good news of the truth we are searching for. In a thousand and one ways he shows us that there is a God, and that this God is the fullness of love. Jesus is the good news of the hope we need. That we can reject sin and walk in the footsteps of Jesus! That this life is succeeded by a new and better life! Jesus is the good news of the peace we crave. We become worried and troubled about too many things, but he is the strength and peace that calms our troubled minds and heals our divided hearts. If only we let him, we can experience him day after day lighting up our lives as our Way, our Truth, and our Life.

But Jesus does not and will not force himself into our lives. This is beautifully illustrated by an incident involving Holman Hunt, who in 1854 painted the now-famous picture, 'Jesus, the Light of the World'.<sup>1</sup> The artist portrays Jesus, crowned with thorns, carrying a lantern, and knocking on a closed door. But when he showed the finished original to some friends, one of them pointed out what seemed to be a serious omission – there was no handle on the door. 'There is no mistake,' the artist replied, 'we must open to the Light. The handle is on the inside.'

There are people not far away living in the darkness of ignorance, prejudice, illness, loneliness, poverty, rejection, bitterness, moral confusion, sadness, guilt and grief. So we continue to acknowledge and respond to the message brought by the Light of the World to 'the people that walked in darkness'. He is sending you and me to bring his light to them with the challenge: 'Recognise me for the good news that I bring and the good news that I am.' So too we keep praying that beautiful contemporary hymn (1987) by Graham Kendrick, popular in churches of all denominations, and in which this is the recurring refrain:

'Shine, Jesus, shine.  
Fill this land with the Father's glory,  
Blaze, Spirit, blaze.  
Set our hearts on fire.  
Flow, river flow.  
Fill the nations with grace and mercy.  
Send forth your word, Lord.  
And let there be light.'

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<sup>1</sup> Visitors to Sydney will find it beautifully reproduced in the stained-glass window above the West Door of the 'Garrison Church' in 'The Rocks'.