



**Welcome to
the Parish of
St Michael
Thirroul**

25 DECEMBER 2023
CHRISTMAS EVE AND DAY
Peace and Joy from the Franciscan Friars

Welcome · especially to visitors attending our Christmas Liturgies.

BISHOP BRIAN MASCORD'S PASTORAL MESSAGE FOR CHRISTMAS 2023

My sisters and brothers in Christ and to all people of goodwill in the Diocese of Wollongong, Grace, peace, and a very happy Christmas to you and your loved ones.



I recently had the joy of leading a pilgrimage to the Holy Land—a wonderful time of prayer, reflection, and connection with God. In pondering the Christmas mystery of Emmanuel, God with us, I am drawn back to my experience in the land that was truly the cradle of our faith. In an unremarkable little town, far from the centres of power, a child was born whose life, death, and resurrection would change the course of history.

As I stepped into the cave that, as tradition holds, was the place where Jesus was born, I was overcome by the humility of our Saviour King. This cave would not have been adorned by the smell of incense or the shimmering of gold. Instead, on that first Christmas day, the incense was the fragrance of a flock of sheep, and the gold was the adoring gaze of a mother and father who had fled their home for fear of losing their lives. Standing in the cave where a feeding box for animals held God himself, I was overwhelmed.

This celebration of the coming of Jesus should remind us that, in a certain sense, every day is Christmas and an opportunity to welcome Emmanuel—God with us—into our lives. We do not need to be afraid nor concerned that we are not “fitting” for him, for surely, “A God who became so small could only be mercy and love” (St Thérèse of Lisieux).

Therefore, with St Ambrose of Milan, I invite you to, “Open wide your door to the One who comes. Open your soul, throw open the depths of your heart to see the riches of simplicity, the treasures of peace, the sweetness of grace. Open your heart and run to meet the Sun of eternal light that illuminates all people.”

And let us join together in prayer for those places in our world, particularly the Holy Land, mired by hatred and violence. May the one we call Prince of Peace bring peace to our world and the heart of all humanity.

Happy Christmas and the blessings of Christ's love.

+Brian Mascord

Most Rev Brian G Mascord DD
BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG



SAINT FRANCIS AND THE CHRISTMAS CRIB

Eight hundred years ago Saint Francis of Assisi was worried the people of Greccio were forgetting the Bambino of Bethlehem and how present Christ was to them in their every day. He desired the simplicity, poverty, and humility of the Christ Child to be made known and remembered. The beautiful vision St Francis had to enact the birth of Christ was part of the Midnight Mass. This is important to note, it wasn't just a show it was wrapped up in the paschal mystery; it was an invitation to know the intimacy of God with us. To see the poverty of the crib leads one to see the emptying of Christ on the Cross and the new life in the Resurrection.

One Franciscan scholar says, "Francis' representation did not include images, but only living beings. He wanted real protagonists." The animals yes, but most especially the people who gathered, the brothers from various places, women and men of the area, rich and poor alike, stood side by side together. This echoes and is reflected into us and our living, by how we enter the celebration of Christ's birth, how we gather as a community of believers. This season, a long time ago in Greccio, is not a time stamped moment, rather it is a launching point for us and for our story now. It calls us to the manger to pause and calls us to the Eucharist to be nourished and share the good news as we go forth from each Eucharist. St Francis wrote, "*Behold, each day He humbles himself as when he came from the royal throne into the Virgin's womb; each day He himself comes to us, appearing humbly, from the bosom of the Father upon the altar.*"

At Christmas, maybe we are coming tired and hurting. Maybe we are coming holding on to a faint hope and deeper desires. Maybe we are seeking shelter from the storms. Maybe everything just feels so out of control or out of sync. Maybe all is content and coming together. Maybe we are filled with wonder and awe. No matter how we are coming to Christmas, the poor Bambino of Bethlehem meets us. As we gaze upon him, he gazes into our heart, he knows our story and loves us deeply, he meets us in each Eucharist. As we look upon our Nativity Scene, as we gather for Christmas Mass, as we connect with family and friends the longing of our heart is stirred up.

In the Christmas Crib, simplicity is given a place of honour, poverty is exalted, humility is commended, and out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem. This is what was burning in the heart of St Francis. It wasn't just a one-time moment for him, rather it is an invitation for him and still one for us and our community. Our hearts becoming a new Bethlehem because we have opened our lives allowing in the Spirit with our hearts caught up in the mystery of the incarnation which is life for all. For when we do, we are sure to encounter and welcome the Bambino of Bethlehem and be filled with joy.

WEEKEND MASS TIMES

Church of St Michael • Thirroul

↘ Saturday 17:30 and Sunday 08:00

Bulli Sunday 08:30 and Sunday 17:30

Corrimal Saturday 18:00 and Sunday 09:30

WEEKDAY LITURGIES **THIS WEEK**

Tuesday 09:30

Wednesday 09:00

Thursday 09:00

Friday 09:30



Patrick Vaughan, *Parish Priest*

Andrew Granc ofm, Ken Cafe ofm, *Assisting*

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Parish Office Hours – **Tuesdays and Wednesdays 09:00 to 12:30 and 13:00 to 15:00 – Fridays 08:30 to 15:00**

🌐 www.thirroulcatholic.org.au

Parish School ☎ 4267 2560