

## St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Penrith

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### *Encouragement Letter (18DEC24)*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

How are you today? Christmas is close! I am thankful for God sending his one and only Son the Lord Jesus Christ into the world to become one of us – Immanuel!

Thank you for everyone who has completed the Congregation Snapshot survey. If you have not completed the Congregational Snapshot survey, please stop now and take some time to fill it out as I am hoping to close the survey by Christmas to look at the results. You can access the survey here: <https://forms.gle/L5qbATyXHJtP88377>

Today's encouragement is by Ben Pratt "Come let us adore him – Welcoming the Stranger" before we head on to church matters.

### **ENCOURAGEMENT: Come let us adore him – Welcoming the Stranger (Ben Pratt)**

*This month Steve has graciously given me the opportunity to share some words of encouragement with our church, and with this being December, it felt right to explore different aspects of the encouragement to "Come let us adore him", as that famous Christmas Carol declares.*

What's your favourite Christmas Carol, and why?

For me, it's "The Little Drummer Boy". Not the most theologically robust Carol ever, I know, but that's not why I love it.

No, I love that song because it reminds me of myself, and that I, like the little drummer boy of the title, was a nobody and an outsider who was invited to go meet Jesus. And I love that song because Mary welcomed that little drummer boy who came with functionally nothing in his hands, and Jesus smiled at him, accepting him as he was.

For you see, I was born into a non-Christian household. One that wasn't even nominally Christian, in fact, both of my parents (who divorced when I was very young) were against the church, and against Christianity in general. Things changed as I got older, but that's a story for another time.

And, interestingly, those outside the accepted "kingdom of God" also play a part in the Christmas story, in the form of the Magi, the wise men from the east.

What am I talking about?

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."*

*When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:*

*"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel."*

*Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."*

*After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

Matthew 2:1-12

These outsiders came on a long and dangerous journey from a foreign land because they had received word that the king of the Jews had been born and they wished to pay homage to him, even though they themselves were not Jewish, not part of God's people!

And, they were welcomed in to Jesus' presence, in spite of this.

Just as many outsiders were welcomed during Jesus' ministry, first with the outcasts within Judaism in the prostitutes, beggars, tax collectors, and others. Then, with the Samaritans and Romans he encountered. And, after his death and resurrection, and the events of Pentecost, the people of every nation were invited to come and see the Lord.

And for the last nearly two thousand years, that invitation has continued to be given out day after day, with many coming from outside the faith to find hope and new life in Jesus Christ.

Just like I did.

I, and uncounted numbers of others, were the beneficiaries of the grace of God, AND the grace of his followers, his people, the church.

Jesus gave us this commandment before he returned to the Father;  
*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Matthew 28:18-20

If we're to make disciples of all nations, then we need to welcome the outsiders in, don't we?

How do we, as Christians, and as a church, welcome the outsiders into our lives, and into our faith community?

This week's challenge is to reflect on what time and space we are making in our own lives to welcome in outsiders, as well as what time and space we are making in our faith community to help them connect with us.

Pray, talk about it, and especially at this time of year when so many from outside the church will be hearing Jesus' name and perhaps even thinking about God or maybe considering attending a Carols service or church service, consider how you can reach out with the good news of Jesus to strangers who are looking for a welcome.

Who knows? Perhaps we'll find a few more "little drummer boys" (and girls) like me.

### **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

I felt like I had to change this last title to begin with "C" as every other heading in this encouragement letter begins with "C", including the title of the encouragement (okay, the last pen ultimate title was a stretch.)

*Sing, choirs of angels,  
Sing in exultation,  
Sing, all ye citizens of Heaven above!  
Glory to God  
In the highest:*

*O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord.*

As always, love and prayers,  
Steve