

**Sermon Preached at St Thomas' Church, Kolkata**

*Diocese of Calcutta, Church of North India*

**12 January 2020**

**The Baptism of Christ**

Dr Murray Harvey, Bishop of Grafton NSW



*Church of St Thomas, Diocese of Calcutta*

Thank you for your warm welcome this morning at St Thomas'. I thank your Bishop, Paritosh Canning, for the generous invitation to the Diocese of Calcutta and for allowing me to preside and preach here this morning on the Third Sunday after Christmas – Baptism of Christ.

I've been in Kolkata since Tuesday, staying at Bishop's House with Bishop Canning and have seen a number of ministries around Calcutta Diocese and Barrackpore Diocese.

In our Post Communion sentence today from 1 Corinthians 12:13, we hear the words of St Paul:

*"By one Spirit we were all Baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit"*

My diocese of Grafton is a very different cultural context to Calcutta Diocese. It's different on many levels: geographically; demographically; ethnically; culturally.

But St Paul reminds us of our common life in the Spirit – the Body of Christ.

The Epiphany Season which we celebrated last Sunday, began with a star that the Wise Men followed.

One of the things my son Lauchie and I have done in your city is to visit the Cathedral: we appreciated the life-size nativity scene on the front lawn, including the three wise men on their journey with camels. The three wise men lean forward as they journey; they have

energy, direction and eagerness: they point ahead and look ahead – I wonder, do we have eagerness for the one we seek?

At Epiphany, we celebrate the light that Christ brings into the world through his birth. He is celebrated as the light to lighten all peoples. But *living in the light* is not easy! There are many challenges, both in Grafton and Calcutta.

I'm the Bishop of Grafton, NSW, Australia: You'd be forgiven if you hadn't heard of Grafton. It's north of Sydney and south of Brisbane. Grafton is a regional/rural diocese on the East Coast. It has a Population of only about ½ million, compared to 14.5 Million for Kolkata!

All of the Australian Anglican Church was originally part of the Diocese of Calcutta before the formation of the Diocese of Australia, then later Sydney, later Newcastle, then Grafton. We have 28 parishes; a social welfare agency "Anglicare"; 5 schools; 3 hospital chaplaincies; 2 religious orders – the Sisters of the Church & Franciscans.

One of our many challenges is the movement of the population away from rural areas into cities – leaving our small country churches with small congregations or no congregations; yet city churches with bigger and bigger populations but few resources.

I was pleased to meet your Bishop Paritosh Canning at Canterbury UK last year.

Despite the many obvious differences, it is clear that our dioceses face many common problems as well. We each inhabit a world that is suspicious of difference and are: challenged to proclaim our unity in Christ where we can celebrate our diversity as members of the one body: baptised into one Spirit.

I'd like to share a story of unity-in-diversity from the indigenous people of Australia

Australia's indigenous people have a rich history and culture: stretching back 40,000 years before European settlement.

*"Long ago in the dreamtime, there was a beautiful coloured land; but the birds had no colour, except the multi-coloured lorikeet (Rainbow Lorikeet). There was a lorikeet who went out one day to find something to eat. He came across a human who said 'I will find you some food for a small favour'. The bird agreed. The human gave the bird some food but then speared the bird so he could eat it. Then a flock of every single bird in the world came and scared the human away. All the birds came to help the wounded Rainbow Lorikeet: as it lay bleeding, its rainbow coloured blood went everywhere, covering all the birds in the colours of the rainbow."*



As our Epiphany journey continues and we think today about the Baptism of Jesus Christ, we remember that his Baptism means he shares our humanity – also our diversity.

Jesus was not English, Indian, Australian – he was a Palestinian Jew: yet we are united with him through baptism in one Spirit. As a Palestinian of the First Century he knew about the oppression and poverty brought about by Roman occupation.

So when our hearts are heavy because of the problems we face: our personal problems, our civic/national problems: in your country and mine; including the many challenges that the church faces in each place ....

Let us be encouraged that Jesus faced problems too! Encouraged that he identified with our human frailty and vulnerability; but overcame them through faith and reliance on God; May we rely on him and on one another, as we all share in the one Spirit into which we were baptised.

Let us pray.

King of Kings and Lord of Lords  
making the true light to shine  
lighten our darkness now and evermore  
that with our lips and in our lives  
we may praise you  
for you are our God  
forever and ever.  
Amen.

*The Bishop signing the Register at St Thomas' on 12 January*

