profound, once upon a time and today. It is a place of human hope and fear, of terrible suffering and great joy. The dark truth of Christmas is that Jesus is born among animals because we crowd God out. We open our doors just a crack and fail to recognise the Lord of life in a poor and nameless traveller and his wife, about to give birth. Our fears bolt the doors against the stranger and the strange. Our inhumanity to one another – personally, communally, globally – crucifies God and keeps our world in wintry darkness. And yet, the Lord came and comes and will come.

Christians believe the flesh-taking of God is not unusual or exceptional, that God is always becoming incarnate, that God always has name and face, birthday and address. The Lord comes despite us, despite our fears, our apathy, even our cruelty to one another. And the miracle is precisely that the divine Lord is more human than any of us, making us human and humane, insisting that God’s will be done on earth as in heaven. ‘Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth.’ Christmas really is a sunrise of wonder, yet another Easter.

with thanks to Gertrud Nelson,

To Dance with God:
Family Ritual and Community Celebration
(New York: Paulist Press, 1986)

The Gospel according to Matthew 1:18-2:23,
and
Our vision is to **support spirituality, provide care and create community** as part of our service to staff and students at Edith Cowan University. We support the opportunity to celebrate, explore and nurture one’s faith.

As a dynamic progressive university, ECU is truly multicultural with students coming from over 75 countries and representing all the major religious traditions. The Multifaith Chaplaincy Service supports and values spirituality, faith and religion as an integral part of life. Our chaplains are skilled professionals recognized within their own religious traditions.

During Harmony Week in 2004, the Multifaith Chaplaincy Service launched an electronic **Faith Calendar**. The Faith Calendar lists all major religious festivals, thus recognizing the convictions held by many staff and students. Updated annually, the Faith Calendar also showcases artwork from the ECU Art Collection.

As an extension to the Faith Calendar, our service has produced a collection of brochures on **Religious Festivals** observed within the various faith traditions.

At ECU, we have Christian staff and students. Celebrating Christmas is a significant time for them as they reaffirm their faith, maintain connections with their traditions and culture, and seek to explore the deeper meanings of life in the context of their community.

The Faith Calendar and various brochures on a range of religious festivals are available on the Multifaith Chaplaincy Service website at [www.ecu.edu.au/chaplaincy](http://www.ecu.edu.au/chaplaincy)

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**Incarnation**

Christmas is not just the birthday of baby Jesus. Christmas is the birthday of the distinctively Christian view of God. This means sentiment, but not sentimentality, the embodiment of that tough love which lies at the heart of reality, the passion and patience and power of supreme gentleness. Christmas celebrates the flesh taking, the incarnation of God, in a human birth and life and death, the emergence of ‘the Beyond in the midst’, making visible invisible truth, making material and physical the ethereal and spiritual. Christians believe Jesus is the sacrament of God’s presence and action, the living focus of God’s presence and action in everything and everyone.

**Pregnant & Waiting**

Many Christians prepare for Christmas in a four week season called Advent, a time of waiting and watching. We are a people pregnant. Pregnant and waiting. Our whole life is spent in waiting. Information puts us on hold and fills our waiting ear with thin, irritating music. Our order hasn’t come in yet. The elevator must be stuck on another floor. Our spouse is late. Will the winter never end, will the sea breeze never come to cool a summer day, will the paint never dry, will anyone ever understand, will I ever change? Life is a series of hopes, and waitings, and partial fulfilments. But waiting, because it is always with us, can become a work of art. We equate waiting with wasting. Waiting is unpractical time, good for nothing, but mysteriously necessary to all that is becoming. As in pregnancy, nothing of value comes into being without a quiet period of incubation: not a healthy baby, not a loving relationship, not a reconciliation, a new understanding, a work of art, never a transformation. Rather, a shortened incubation brings forth what is not strong or whole or even alive. Brewing, baking, simmering, fermenting, ripening, germinating, gestating are the feminine processes of becoming and they are the symbolic states of being which belong in a life of value, necessary to growth and maturity.

**Birthing**

Sentimentality at Christmas makes the sheep too white and woolly, the shaggy donkey quaint, the manger picturesque and sweet-smelling, the Virgin soft and melting. The real Bethlehem is more