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PRIME MINISTER

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

It is from the Christmas story that the spiritual strength of so many Australians derives.

Christmas is a time for family and friends to come together. For most of us it will be a time of plenty and a time for celebration. We will renew links with the past and look forward to another eventful and fulfilling year.

But as we celebrate we should spare a thought for those who are less able to fully enjoy the spirit of Christmas.

At times we may take it for granted that Australia is indeed the Lucky Country. But even in the Lucky Country tragedy can strike with unexpected brutality and force. Port Arthur was one such event during the year which shook the nation to its foundations. But in the wake of such tragedy we came together as a nation to reduce the opportunity for such incidents in the future.

At Christmas it is worth remembering the qualities that set Australia apart as a nation. The tolerance, understanding and freedom that are the hallmarks of our society are all elements which should be recognised and nurtured as special qualities which must be preserved and never taken for granted. Christmas is a time to reflect on the great benefits of living in such an environment and of the need to preserve such qualities for future generations through co-operation and vigilance.

My wife and children join me in wishing all Australians a Merry Christmas.