**Christmas message 2016**

**By Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA**

**Embargoes until Friday, 23 December, 2016**

“I will honour Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year.”

That is a quote from the Christmas classic A Christmas Carol written 173 years ago, but the words still ring true today and they hold a special place in my own heart.

This is one of my favourite times of year and feelings of generosity, kindness and love that come with this special season are those that I truly wish we could keep all year.

There is much ado about Christmas as we run about trying to gather all of the items that will make this holiday special.

By now all the lights are up, the trees decorated, the presents purchased and wrapped. We have been treated to wonderful Christmas choirs and gatherings featuring sparkly drinks and good food. We have watched with glee the youngest among us take part in Christmas pageants and helped them pen their letters to Santa.

It’s been a busy and sometimes hectic run-up to this special day. But it has finally arrived.

Now it is time to reflect and focus on the important things in our lives in the Cayman Islands.

We have seen major political changes in the past 12 months from the people of Britain choosing to divorce themselves from the European Union to the election of a new president in the US. We have also seen problems across the world caused by natural disasters as well as man-made tragedies through the horrors of terrorism and wars and failed economies caused by bad governance.

Fortunately here at home we have had many reasons to celebrate giving us good cause to keep Christmas in our hearts. Cayman’s economy continued to grow this past year and more people are employed than they were a year ago. Things have gotten better for Caymanians. Growth will continue into next year and so we expect the lives of Caymanians will continue to improve into 2017.

 It is not unusual when asking a Caymanian how they are doing when I meet them at the supermarket or on the sidewalk for them to reply, “Blessed. I am blessed.”

Those are the people who are keeping Christmas constantly in their hearts because they realise their blessings, as we all should.

In the book of Luke we read the words of Elizabeth to Mary when told that Mary was pregnant with the Christ child. “Blessed among women are you and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”

It is that Christ child that we celebrate at this wonderful time of year.

And it is his admonition to us that it is more blessed to give than to receive that we take to heart at Christmastime.

Giving doesn’t just mean buying or making presents for family members, friends and co-workers. The more we give of ourselves the more blessed we are.

I will realise my blessings when I spend my Christmastime with my wife, sons, father, sisters, other family and friends. I hope that you too have an opportunity to pause and reflect and take time to share the holiday with family, friends and neighbours.

I sincerely hope that each of you has a joyous Christmas and the feelings of goodwill and generosity we are feeling at this special time are truly kept in your hearts all year long.

On behalf of Government, my family and myself, I wish each of you a wonderful Christmas filled with love, laughter and blessings.

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