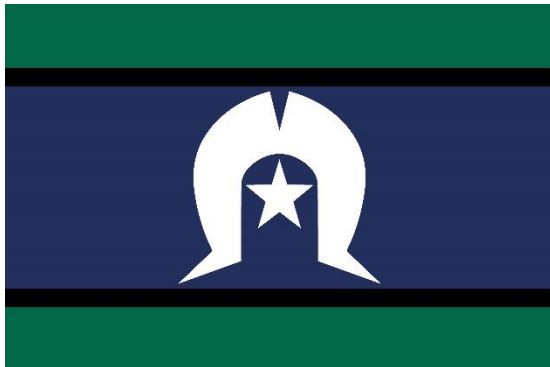


Coming of the Light - Torres Strait Islands



The Coming of the Light is a holiday celebrated by Torres Strait Islanders on 1 July each year. It recognises the adoption of Christianity through island communities during the late nineteenth century.

Origins

The London Missionary Society set out to convert people of the Southwest Pacific to Christianity from the 1840s. In July 1871, the Reverend Samuel MacFarlane, a member of the Society anchored at Erub (Darnley Island) in the Torres Strait. He was accompanied by South Sea Islander evangelists and teachers.

In defiance of tribal law Dabad, a Warrior Clan Elder on Erub welcomed the London Missionary Society clergy and teachers.

Effect

The acceptance of the missionaries and Christianity into the Torres Strait Islands is often credited with ending

conflict between different island groups. However, Christian principles were already somewhat compatible with Islander religion. The missionaries offered a more practical advantage. Torres Strait Islanders had been grossly exploited in the maritime industry. The missionaries provided some protection and assistance to Islanders who negotiated with outsiders in the maritime industry.

The acceptance of missionaries and Christianity into Torres Strait led to profound changes that affected every aspect of life from that time onwards.

Annual Celebrations

Torres Strait Islanders living on the islands or on the mainland come together to honour this anniversary every year. Islanders of all faiths celebrate the Coming of the Light in a festival like no other in Australia.

Activities include church services and a re-enactment of the landing at Kemus on Erub. Hymn singing, feasting and *Ailan dans* strengthen community and family ties.



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