ABC to televise Pope Benedict XVI celebrating Midnight Mass from St Peter's Basilica on Christmas Day

Pope Benedict XVI is preparing to celebrate his first Christmas Midnight Mass since being elected pontiff and Australians are warmly invited to tune into ABC Television on Christmas Day to witness this historic event.

ABC Television will broadcast Midnight Mass from St Peter's Basilica in Rome from 11.10am AEST.

The Nine Network will also feature Christmas programming on Christmas Day provided by the National Catholic Television Library, a body of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

Early risers can catch "*The First Christmas*" at 7.30am Christmas Morning, December 25.

Narrated by Christopher Plummer this clay animation production tells the traditional story of birth of Jesus, beginning with Mary and Joseph's trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem. We witness their encounter with the innkeeper who has 'no room at the inn' but provides shelter in a stable where Mary gives birth. Rebecca the innkeeper's daughter, and Daniel, the shepherd boy, provides a strong supporting cast. The mood is enhanced by familiar Christmas music in the background.

Later in the day, the Library presents *Celebrate Christmas*, a locally-produced one-hour Christmas variety special on Channel 10 and affiliates at 1:30 pm.

Guests include Fr Bob Maguire, sociologist Hugh Mackay, and Muslim of the Year Susan Carlin. The program is hosted by Catholic TV veteran Peter Thomas on behalf of an ecumenical production group that includes the Bishops' Television Library.