



2022 Christmas Message

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Monday 12 December 2022

Grace and peace to you from God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 1:2).

As I do not know at what time of the day or night you might be hearing or reading this special Christmas message I cannot greet you with a “good morning” or a “good afternoon” or “good evening”. Instead, I greet you with the words of Saint Paul from his Letter to the Philippians.

But whatever time of the day it is as you read, watch and listen to this message, I do want to say thank you for allowing me into your homes and into your lives for these few moments.

In the first letter of St John, we find what it means to speak of God’s grace and peace. The letter encourages us to *“think of the love which the Father has lavished upon us by letting us be called God’s children - for that is what we are ... what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed. All we know is that when it is revealed, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is”* (1 John 3:1). The gift of life, which the Lord gives us now, and which will reach its fulfilment with the Lord in heaven, is a wonderful gift indeed: it is a gift of grace and peace. How grateful we should be.

While this year of 2022 has been so very challenging; it is also a chance to see, particularly for us as Catholics, the miracle of life and grace which God gives us – and his great love for us which is revealed in this gift.

Christmas is a time when we remember that God has come so near to us in the person of Jesus, born not in luxury and splendour but in the most humble of circumstances. As we welcome him once again, at the end of a very challenging year for many, we know that he comes, as he always does, to heal our wounds and warm our hearts. As we contemplate him



lying helplessly in the manger, we see what it means to say that God loves us. God's love for us is expressed in closeness - as love always is.

God wants to be so close to us, in fact, that he becomes one of us, sharing in everything that is ours as human beings, except sin of course. He in turn invites us to share in everything that is his. This is why, in Matthew's Gospel, the newborn child is given the name "*Emmanuel*", a name which means "*God is with us*" (Matthew 1:23).

We then watch as this little child, born in the stable of Bethlehem, grows up to begin his life's work. He describes this as "*bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives, giving sight to the blind, setting the downtrodden free, and announcing a year of favour from the Lord*". This is what it means to heal wounds and warm hearts. Sometimes Jesus heals physical wounds and often, perhaps even more importantly, he heals the deeper, spiritual wounds, as he did for Peter when he forgave him for his threefold cowardly betrayal and denial (cf. John 21:15-17). Jesus warmed hearts that had grown cold and hard through fear, rejection, suffering or despair - and we are called to do the same.

The events of the first Christmas reveal something extraordinary about God. It is as if, through Jesus, he is saying to us: *in the extraordinary vastness and complexity of my creation, you are the ones whom I have created and chosen to enter into a relationship of profound and intimate love with me.*

So much do I love you, and want to be one with you, that I have, in my Son Jesus, become one of you and one with you. In a world in which it is so easy to lose sight of me, misunderstand me, or even forget me, I have given you my Son, so that in him you might hear me speak, see me reach out with compassion, recognise me as the one who heals and forgives, and see me, in his suffering and death, as the one who will go to any lengths to save you - because I love you.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, I invite you to gaze with wonder on this helpless baby, lying in his manger. Recognise in him the extraordinary love God has for you. Allow that love to be the foundation of your lives, a source of strength and hope in times of struggle and sorrow, and an inspiration for that reaching out to others with compassion and care which is the defining characteristic of life lived to the full, of life lived as a disciple of Jesus.



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May this be a time of deep happiness, of reconciliation and peace, and of joyful hope for the future for you, your families and all those who are dear to you. A happy and holy Christmas to you all.

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