



The mystery of Christmas

La Nativité (1728) by Noël-Nicolas Coypel

BISHOP BRIAN MASCORD'S PASTORAL MESSAGE FOR CHRISTMAS 2022



My sisters and brothers in Christ and to all people of goodwill in the Diocese of Wollongong,

Grace, peace, and a very happy Christmas to you and your loved ones.

During the first animated Peanuts Christmas Special in 1965, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown exclaims, “Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?” This is the question that we return to every year and that each person must have an answer for in their heart. Yes, Christmas is a day to celebrate our relationships with one another, but it is also the day we celebrate the relationship we have with the One who pitched his tent among us. We often do this with presents, and food, and drink—a time to gather together, stop, and simply “be” with one another. For many people, it is also a day to serve those in our communities who are homeless, sick, or grieving. But why this day? Why Christmas?

At the heart of Christmas is a *mystery*. On this day we remember that: “Once in our world, a stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole

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C.S. LEWIS

world” (C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*), or rather, *someone* bigger than our whole world—the Son of God; the Light of the World, Jesus. Today, “Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God” (St Benedict, *RB Prologue*, 9).

Jesus—born in a manger—tells us that, “A God who became so small could only be mercy and love” (St Therese of Lisieux). Jesus, truly God and truly man, became one of us so that we might be drawn into the very life of God (cf. St Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres* III, 19, 1). Jesus, born to die on the cross, is the saviour of the World (cf. Jn 3:16).

But perhaps even more mysterious still, Jesus teaches us who we are. Indeed, this day is a great celebration because the incarnation, God becoming flesh, bears witness to the truth as St Pope John Paul II said in his Christmas Day message in 1978: “Every human being [is] somebody unique and unrepeatable.... Somebody thought of and chosen from eternity, some[one] called and identified by their own name.” You are known and loved by God. Christmas is a testament to that fact.

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Rest on the Flight into Egypt (1641) by Laurent de La Hyre

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Many people in our community, often beset by disconnection and isolation, question not only their situation, but their worth; their very existence. Christmas speaks to this pain. Christmas says to us: if God humbled himself to become one of us, how can you be “so worthless in your own eyes and yet so precious to God?” (St Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 148).

So today, let us allow Christmas to speak to our hearts the truth of who Jesus is and who we are. In Jesus, we see God's glory and the dignity of humanity. We see the gift of God with us—Emmanuel.

I invite you to pray with me this Christmas prayer of St Pope John XXIII:

*O sweet Child of Bethlehem,
grant that we may share with all our
hearts in this profound mystery of Christmas.*

*Put into the hearts of men and women
this peace for which they
sometimes seek so desperately
and which you alone can give to them.*

*Help them to know one another better,
and to live as brothers and sisters,
children of the same Father.*

*Reveal to them also your beauty,
holiness and purity.*

*Awaken in their hearts love
and gratitude for
your infinite goodness.*

*Join them all
together in your love.*

And give us your heavenly peace.

Amen.

I wish you every Christmas blessing and may the peace and joy of this blessed day be with you and your loved ones. And may you recognise, in those around you Emmanuel, God with us.

Yours in Christ

+ Brian Mascord

Most Rev Brian G Mascord DD
BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG



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