

Christmas

The following is St. John Paul II's *Urbi et Orbi* Message, Christmas 1998. (My homily was a shortened form of his words).

“Come, let us adore the King, the Lord, who is to come”.

How many times have we repeated these words throughout the season of Advent, echoing the expectation of all humanity.

Straining towards the future from his very origins, man thirsts for God, the fullness of life. From the beginning he has invoked a Saviour to free him from evil and death, to fulfil his need for happiness. In the Garden of Eden, after the first sin, God the Father, faithful and merciful, had foretold to him the coming of a Savior (cf. *Gn* 3:15), who would restore the broken covenant, and create a new relationship of friendship, understanding and peace.

This joyful message, entrusted to the children of Abraham, from the time of the Exodus from Egypt (cf. *Ex* 3:6-8), has echoed down the centuries as a cry of hope on the lips of Israel's Prophets, who time and again reminded the people: “The Lord is near; come let us adore him!”

Come to adore the God who does not forsake those who seek him with a sincere heart and strive to keep his law. Heed his message which strengthens hearts broken and confused. Faithful to his ancient promise, God the Father has now brought it to pass in the mystery of Christmas.

Yes, his promise, which nourished the trusting expectation of countless believers, has become a gift in Bethlehem, in the heart of the Holy Night.

Yesterday the Liturgy of the Mass reminded us of it: “Today you will know that the Lord comes: at daybreak you will see his glory”.

Last night we saw the glory of God, proclaimed by the joyful singing of the angels; we have adored the King, the Lord of the universe, together with the shepherds keeping watch over their flock.

With the eyes of faith we too have seen, placed in a manger, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, and beside him the Virgin Mother in silent adoration.

Today we join the angelic host, the enraptured shepherds; we too sing in exultation: “Christ is born for us: come, let us adore him.”

From the night of Bethlehem until today, the Birth of the Lord continues to inspire hymns of joy which express the tenderness of God, sown in the hearts of men. In all the world's tongues, the event most grand and most lowly is being celebrated: Emmanuel, God with us for ever.

How many expressive songs has Christmas inspired in every people and culture!
Who has not known the emotions they express?

Their melodies bring alive once more the mystery of the Holy Night; they tell of the encounter between the Gospel and the paths of mankind.

Yes, Christmas has entered the hearts of the peoples, who look to Bethlehem with shared wonderment.

How can we fail to notice the strident contrast between the serenity of the Christmas carols and the many problems of the present hour?

We know the disturbing developments from the reports coming each day from television and the newspapers, sweeping from one hemisphere to the other of the globe: tragic situations, which often involve human guilt and even malice, soaked in fratricidal hate and senseless violence.

May the light coming from Bethlehem save us from the danger of becoming resigned to so tormented and distressing a scenario.

May the proclamation of Christmas be a source of encouragement to all those who work to bring relief to the tormented situation in the Middle East by respecting international commitments.

May Christmas help to strengthen and renew, throughout the world, the consensus concerning the need for urgent and adequate measures to halt the production and sale of arms, to defend human life, to end the death penalty, to free children and adolescents from all forms of exploitation, to restrain the bloodied hand of those responsible for genocide and crimes of war, to give environmental issues, especially after the recent natural catastrophes, the indispensable attention which they deserve for the protection of creation and of human dignity!

May the joy of Christmas, which sings of the birth of the Savior, instill in all trust in the power of truth and of patient perseverance in doing good.

For each of us the divine message of Bethlehem resounds: "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy, to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (*Lk 2:10-11*).

Today there shines forth, *Urbi et Orbi*, upon the city of Rome and upon the whole world, the face of God: Jesus reveals him to us as the Father who loves us.

All you who are seeking the meaning of life, all you whose hearts are burning with the hope of salvation, freedom and peace, come to meet the Child born of Mary:

He is God, our Savior, the only one worthy of this name, the one Lord.

He is born for us, come, let us adore him!