



# The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** *Library of the Apostolic Palace*

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## Catechesis on Christmas

In this catechesis, as we approach Christmas, I would like to offer some food for thought in preparation for the celebration of Christmas. In the Midnight Mass liturgy the Angel's proclamation to the shepherds will resound: "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (*Lk 2:10-12*).

In imitation of the shepherds, we too move spiritually towards Bethlehem, where Mary gave birth to the Child in a stable, "because there was no place for them in the inn" (2:7). Christmas has become a universal feast, and even those who do not believe perceive the appeal of this occasion. A Christian, however, knows that Christmas is a decisive event, an eternal fire that God has kindled in the world, and must not be confused with ephemeral things. It is important that it not be reduced to a merely sentimental or consumerist festivity. Last Sunday I drew attention to this problem, underscoring that consumerism has hijacked Christmas. No: Christmas must not be reduced to a merely sentimental or consumerist feast, full of gifts and good wishes but poor in Christian faith, and also poor in humanity. Therefore, it is necessary to curb a certain worldly mentality, incapable of grasping the incandescent core of our faith, which is this: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (*Jn 1:14*). And this is the heart of Christmas; rather, it is the truth of Christmas, there is no other.

Christmas invites us to reflect, on the one hand, on the drama of history, in which men and women, wounded by sin, are unceasingly in search of truth, in search of mercy, and in search of redemption; and, on the other hand, of the goodness of God, who came towards us to communicate to us the Truth that saves and to make us share in his friendship and his life. And this gift of grace: this is *pure* grace, not by any merit of our own. There is a Holy Father who says: "But look this way, the other way, over there: seek your merit and you will find nothing other than

grace”. Everything is grace, a gift of grace. And this gift of grace, we receive it through the simplicity and humanity of Christmas, and it can remove from our hearts and minds the pessimism that has spread even more nowadays as a result of the pandemic. We can overcome that sense of disquieting bewilderment, not letting ourselves be overwhelmed by defeat and failure, in the rediscovered awareness that that humble and poor Child, hidden away and helpless, is God himself, made man for us. The [Second Vatican Council](#), in a famous passage from the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, tells us that this event concerns every one of us: “For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin” (Pastoral Constitution [Gaudium et Spes](#) , 22). But Jesus was born two thousand years ago, and this pertains to me? — Yes, it pertains to you and me, to each one of us. Jesus is one of us: God, in Jesus, is one of us.

This reality gives us much joy and courage. God did not look down on us, from afar, he did not pass us by, he was not repulsed by our misery, he did not clothe himself only superficially in a body, but rather he fully assumed our nature and our human condition. He left nothing out, except sin: the only thing he does not have. All humanity is in him. He took all that we are, just as we are. This is essential for understanding the Christian faith. Saint Augustine, reflecting on his journey of conversion, writes in his *Confessions*: “For I did not hold to my Lord Jesus Christ, I, humbled, to the Humble; nor knew I yet whereto His infirmity would guide us” (*Confessions* VII , 8). And what is Jesus’ “infirmity”? The “infirmity” of Jesus is a “teaching”! Because it reveals to us the love of God. Christmas is the feast of Love incarnate, of love born for us in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the light of mankind shining in the darkness, giving meaning to human existence and to the whole of history.

Dear brothers and sisters, may these brief reflections help us to celebrate Christmas with greater awareness. But there is another way to prepare ourselves, which I want to remind you and me, and which is within everyone’s reach: to contemplate a little, in silence, before the Nativity scene. The Nativity display is a catechesis of this reality, of what was done that year, that day, which we have heard in the Gospel. This is why last year I wrote a Letter, which would be good for us to pick up again. It is entitled “[Admirabile signum](#)”, “Enchanting image”. In the school of Saint Francis of Assisi, we can become a little childlike by pausing to contemplate the scene of the Nativity, and by letting the wonder of the “marvellous” way in which God wanted to come into the world be reborn in us. Let us ask for the grace of wonder: before this mystery, a reality so tender, so beautiful, so close to our hearts, that the Lord may give us the grace of wonder, to encounter him, to draw closer to him, to draw closer to us all. This will revive tenderness in us. The other day, while I was speaking with some scientists, we spoke about artificial intelligence and robots... there are robots programmed for everyone and everything, and this continues to advance. And I asked them, “But what is it that robots will never be able to do?”. They thought about it, they made suggestions, but in the end they were all in agreement about one thing: tenderness. Robots will never be capable of

this. And this is what God brings us, today: a wonderful way in which God wanted to come into the world, and this revives tenderness in us, the human tenderness close to that of God. And today we are in great need of tenderness, in great need of a human caress, in the face of so much misery! If the pandemic has forced us to be more distant, Jesus, in the Nativity scene, shows us the way of tenderness to be close to each other, to be human. Let us follow this path. Merry Christmas!

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### ***Special Greetings***

I cordially greet the English-speaking faithful. In these last days before Christmas, I invoke upon you and your families the joy and peace of the Lord Jesus. God bless you!

Lastly as usual my thoughts turn to *the elderly*, to *young people*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. May Mary's complete willingness and Joseph's swift generosity be an example in welcoming Baby Jesus in the mystery of Christmas. I offer my cordial wishes for a Holy Christmas of tidings and serenity to you all.

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### **Summary of the Holy Father's words:**

Dear brothers and sisters: As Christmas approaches, we prepare to hear once more the joyful message of the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem: "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy... for to you is born this day a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:10-12). Like the shepherds, we too are called to make a spiritual journey to Bethlehem to seek and find Jesus, God's eternal light shining in the world. Christmas invites us to overcome a certain worldly mentality that blinds us to the core of our faith: the Word made flesh who dwells among us. It reminds us that God's eternal plan intersects with our history and opens the way to a better future. This year, amid the global health crisis, Christmas can help us look ahead and embrace the hope that the newborn Jesus offers us. As we reflect and pray before the Christm

as crèche may we become more aware of the closeness and tender love of God, who took flesh for our salvation. This Christmas, may Jesus be born anew in each of us, so that by our lives we may bring joy and new hope to all.

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