



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

**ANGELUS**

*St Peter's Square*

*Fourth Sunday of Advent, 20 December 2009*

(Video)

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

With the Fourth Sunday of Advent, the Lord's Birth is at hand. With the words of the Prophet Micah, the Liturgy invites us to look at Bethlehem, the little town in Judea that witnessed the great event: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, / too small to be among the clans of Judah, / From you shall come forth for me / one who is to be ruler in Israel; / Whose origin is from of old, / from ancient times" (Mic 5: 1). One thousand years before Christ Bethlehem had given birth to the great King David, with whose presentation as an ancestor of the Messiah the Scriptures agree. The Gospel according to Luke tells that Jesus was born in Bethlehem because Joseph, Mary's husband, being "of the house and lineage of David", was obliged to go to that town for the census, and in those very days Mary gave birth to Jesus (cf. Lk 2: 1-7). In fact, Micah's prophecy continues precisely by mentioning the mysterious birth: "Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time / when she who is to give birth has borne, / And the rest of his brethren shall return to the children of Israel" (Mic 5: 2). Thus there is a divine plan that apprehends and explains the times and places of the coming into the world of the Son of God. It is a plan of peace, as the Prophet announces further, speaking of the Messiah: "He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the Lord, / in the majestic name of the Lord, his God; / And they shall remain, for now his greatness / shall reach to the ends of the earth; / he shall be peace" (Mic 5: 3).

Precisely this aspect of the prophecy, that of messianic peace, leads us naturally to emphasize that the city of Bethlehem is also a symbol of peace, in the Holy Land and in the world.

Unfortunately, in our day, it does not represent an attained and stable peace, but rather a peace sought with effort and hope. Yet God is never resigned to this state of affairs, so that this year too, in Bethlehem and throughout the world, the mystery of Christmas will be renewed in the Church. A prophecy of peace for every person which obliges Christians to immerse themselves in the closures, tragedies, that are often unknown and hidden, and in the conflicts of the context in which they live, with the sentiments of Jesus so that they may become everywhere instruments and messengers of peace, to sow love where there is hatred, pardon where there is injury, joy where there is sadness and truth where there is error, according to the beautiful words of a well-known Franciscan prayer.

Today, as in the times of Jesus, Christmas is not a fairy-tale for children but God's response to the drama of humanity in search of true peace. "He shall be peace", says the Prophet referring to the Messiah. It is up to us to open, to fling open wide the doors to welcome him. Let us learn from Mary and Joseph: let us place ourselves with faith at the service of God's plan. Even if we do not understand it fully, let us entrust ourselves to his wisdom and goodness. Let us seek first of all the Kingdom of God, and Providence will help us. A Happy Christmas to you all!

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#### **After the Angelus:**

I address a cordial greeting to the staff of *L'Osservatore Romano*, which, in the Christmas period, has a mobile post in St Peter's Square where it is possible to purchase the newspaper together with a small Christmas icon. I wish every good to this initiative, which as well as distributing the Vatican daily proposes to support the foundation of a school in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I greet all the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims here today. On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we are filled with joy because the Lord is at hand. We heard in today's Gospel about Mary's journey to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Just as Mary travelled through the hill country of Judah, to share with her kinswoman the joyful news of Christ's coming, so too the Church is called to journey through history, proclaiming the wondrous message of salvation. As the great feast of Christmas draws near, I invoke God's abundant Blessings upon all of you, and upon your families and loved ones at home.

I wish everyone a peaceful Sunday and a happy celebration of holy Christmas.

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