



The Holy See

URBI ET ORBI MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

CHRISTMAS 2008

"The grace of God our Saviour has appeared to all" (*Tit* 2:11, Vulg.)

Dear brothers and sisters, in the words of the Apostle Paul, I once more joyfully proclaim Christ's Birth. Today "the grace of God our Saviour" has truly "appeared to all!"

It appeared! This is what the Church celebrates today. The grace of God, rich in goodness and love, is no longer hidden. It "*appeared*", it was manifested in the flesh, it showed its face. Where? In Bethlehem. When? Under Caesar Augustus, during the first census, which the Evangelist Luke also mentions. And who is the One who reveals it? A newborn Child, the Son of the Virgin Mary. In him the grace of God our Saviour has appeared. And so that Child is called *Jehoshua*, Jesus, which means: "God saves".

The grace of God has appeared. That is why Christmas is a feast of light. Not like the full daylight which illumines everything, but a glimmer beginning in the night and spreading out from a precise point in the universe: from the stable of Bethlehem, where the divine Child was born. Indeed, he is the light itself, which begins to radiate, as portrayed in so many paintings of the Nativity. He is the light whose appearance breaks through the gloom, dispels the darkness and enables us to understand the meaning and the value of our own lives and of all history. Every Christmas crib is a simple yet eloquent invitation to open our hearts and minds to the mystery of life. It is an encounter with the immortal Life which became mortal in the mystic scene of the Nativity: a scene which we can admire here too, in this Square, as in countless churches and chapels throughout the world, and in every house where the name of Jesus is adored.

The grace of God has appeared *to all*. Jesus – the face of the "God who saves", did not show himself only for a certain few, but for everyone. Although it is true that in the simple and lowly

dwelling of Bethlehem few persons encountered him, still he came for all: Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, those near and those far away, believers and non-believers... for everyone.

Supernatural grace, by God's will, is meant for every creature. Yet each human person needs to accept that grace, to utter his or her own "yes", like Mary, so that his or her heart can be illumined by a ray of that divine light. It was Mary and Joseph, who that night welcomed the incarnate Word, awaiting it with love, along with the shepherds who kept watch over their flocks (cf. *Lk 2:1-20*). A small community, in other words, which made haste to adore the Child Jesus; a tiny community which represents the Church and all people of good will. Today too those who await him, who seek him in their lives, encounter the God who out of love became our brother – all those who turn their hearts to him, who yearn to see his face and to contribute to the coming of his Kingdom. Jesus himself would say this in his preaching: these are the poor in spirit; those who mourn, the meek, those who thirst for justice; the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers, and those persecuted for righteousness' sake (cf. *Mt 5:3-10*). They are the ones who see in Jesus the face of God and then set out again, like the shepherds of Bethlehem, renewed in heart by the joy of his love.

Brothers and sisters, all you who are listening to my words: this proclamation of hope – the heart of the Christmas message – is meant *for all* men and women. Jesus was born for everyone, and just as Mary, in Bethlehem, offered him to the shepherds, so on this day the Church presents him to all humanity, so that each person and every human situation may come to know the power of God's saving grace, which alone can transform evil into good, which alone can change human hearts, making them oases of peace.

May the many people who continue to dwell in darkness and the shadow of death (cf. *Lk 1:79*) come to know the power of God's saving grace! May the divine Light of Bethlehem radiate throughout the Holy Land, where the horizon seems once again bleak for Israelis and Palestinians. May it spread throughout Lebanon, Iraq and the whole Middle East. May it bring forth rich fruit from the efforts of all those who, rather than resigning themselves to the twisted logic of conflict and violence, prefer instead the path of dialogue and negotiation as the means of resolving tensions within each country and finding just and lasting solutions to the conflicts troubling the region. This light, which brings transformation and renewal, is besought by the people of Zimbabwe, in Africa, trapped for all too long in a political and social crisis which, sadly, keeps worsening, as well as the men and women of the Democratic Republic of Congo, especially in the war-torn region of Kivu, Darfur, in Sudan, and Somalia, whose interminable sufferings are the tragic consequence of the lack of stability and peace. This light is awaited especially by the children living in those countries, and the children of all countries experiencing troubles, so that their future can once more be filled with hope.

Wherever the dignity and rights of the human person are trampled upon; wherever the selfishness of individuals and groups prevails over the common good; wherever fratricidal hatred and the exploitation of man by man risk being taken for granted; wherever internecine conflicts divide

ethnic and social groups and disrupt peaceful coexistence; wherever terrorism continues to strike; wherever the basics needed for survival are lacking; wherever an increasingly uncertain future is regarded with apprehension, even in affluent nations: in each of these places may the Light of Christmas shine forth and encourage all people to do their part in a spirit of authentic solidarity. If people look only to their own interests, our world will certainly fall apart.

Dear brothers and sisters, today, "the grace of God our Saviour has appeared" (cf. *Tit* 2:11) in this world of ours, with all its potential and its frailty, its advances and crises, its hopes and travails. Today, there shines forth the light of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Most High and the son of the Virgin Mary: "God from God, light from light, true God from true God. For us men, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven". Let us adore him, this very day, in every corner of the world, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a lowly manger. Let us adore him in silence, while he, still a mere infant, seems to comfort us by saying: Do not be afraid, "I am God, and there is no other" (*Is* 45:22). Come to me, men and women, peoples and nations, come to me. Do not be afraid: I have come to bring you the love of the Father, and to show you the way of peace.

Let us go, then, brothers and sisters! Let us make haste, like the shepherds on that Bethlehem night. God has come to meet us; he has shown us his face, full of grace and mercy! May his coming to us not be in vain! Let us seek Jesus, let us be drawn to his light which dispels sadness and fear from every human heart. Let us draw near to him with confidence, and bow down in humility to adore him. Merry Christmas to all!