



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Paul VI Audience Hall*

*Wednesday, 19 December 2007*

***Christ's birth***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

In these days, as we come gradually closer to the great Feast of Christmas, the liturgy impels us to intensify our preparation, placing at our disposal many biblical texts of the Old and New Testaments that encourage us to focus clearly on the meaning and value of this annual feast day. If, on the one hand, Christmas makes us commemorate the incredible miracle of the birth of the Only-Begotten Son of God from the Virgin Mary in the Bethlehem Grotto, on the other, it also urges us to wait, watching and praying, for our Redeemer himself, who on the last day "will come to judge the living and the dead". Perhaps we today, even we believers, really await the Judge, but we all expect justice. We see so much injustice in the world, in our little world, at home, in the neighbourhood, but also in the great world of States and societies. And we expect justice to be done. Justice is an abstract concept: one does justice. We are waiting for one to come in concrete terms who can do justice. And in this sense we pray: Come, Lord Jesus Christ, as Judge, come in your own way. The Lord knows how to enter the world and create justice. Let us pray that the Lord, the Judge, will respond to us, that he will truly create justice in the world. We are waiting for justice but it cannot be merely the expression of a certain requirement with regard to others. Waiting for justice in the Christian sense means above all that we ourselves begin to live under the eyes of the Judge, in accordance with the criteria of the Judge; that we begin to live in his presence, doing justice in our own lives. Thus, by doing justice, putting ourselves in the Judge's presence, we wait for justice in reality. And this is the meaning of Advent, of vigilance. The watchfulness of Advent means living under the eyes of the Judge and thus preparing ourselves and the world for justice. In this way, therefore, living under the eyes of the God-Judge, we can open the world to the coming of his Son and predispose hearts to welcome "the Lord who comes".

The Child whom the shepherds adored in a grotto on the night of Bethlehem about 2,000 years ago, never tires of visiting us in our daily lives while we journey on as pilgrims towards the Kingdom. In his expectation, therefore, the believer becomes an interpreter of the hopes of all humanity; humanity yearns for justice and thus, although often unconsciously, is waiting for God, waiting for salvation which God alone can give to us. For us Christians, this expectation is marked by assiduous prayer, as appears clearly in the particularly evocative series of prayers proposed to us during these days of the Christmas Novena, in Mass, in the Gospel acclamation and in the celebration of Vespers before the Cantic of the *Magnificat*.

Each one of the invocations that implores the coming of Wisdom, of the Sun of justice, of the God-with-us, contains a prayer addressed by the people to the One awaited so that he will hasten his coming. However, invoking the gift of the birth of the promised Saviour also means committing ourselves to preparing his way, to having a worthy dwelling-place ready for him, not only in the area that surrounds us but especially within our souls. Letting ourselves be guided by the Evangelist John, let us seek in these days, therefore, to turn our minds and hearts to the eternal Word, to the *Logos*, to the Word that was made flesh, from whose fullness we have received grace upon grace (cf. Jn 1: 14, 16). This faith in the *Logos* Creator, in the Word who created the world, in the One who came as a Child, this faith and its great hope unfortunately appear today far from the reality of life lived every day, publicly or privately. This truth seems too great. As for us, we fend for ourselves according to the possibilities we find, or at least this is how it seems. Yet, in this way the world becomes ever more chaotic and even violent; we see it every day. And the light of God, the light of Truth, is extinguished. Life becomes dark and lacks a compass.

Thus, how important it is that we really are believers and that as believers we strongly reaffirm, with our lives, the mystery of salvation that brings with it the celebration of Christ's Birth! In Bethlehem, the Light which brightens our lives was manifested to the world; the way that leads us to the fullness of our humanity was revealed to us. If people do not recognize that God was made man, what is the point of celebrating Christmas? The celebration becomes empty. We Christians must first reaffirm the truth about the Birth of Christ with deep and heartfelt conviction, in order to witness to all the awareness of an unprecedented gift which is not only a treasure for us but for everyone. From this stems the duty of evangelization which is, precisely, the communication of this "*eu-angelion*", this "Good News". This was recently recalled in the Document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith entitled *Doctrinal Note on some aspects of evangelization*, which I would like to submit to your reflection and your personal and community study (3 December 2007).

Dear friends, in this preparation for Christmas, now at hand, the Church's prayer for the fulfilment of the hopes of peace, salvation and justice which the world today urgently needs becomes more intense. Let us ask God to grant that violence be overcome by the power of love, that opposition give way to reconciliation and that the desire to oppress be transformed into the desire for forgiveness, justice and peace. May the kind and loving good wishes that we exchange in these

days reach all the contexts of our daily lives. May peace be in our hearts so that they are open to the action of God's grace. May peace dwell in families and may they spend Christmas united in front of the crib and the tree decorated with lights. May the message of solidarity and good will that comes from Christmas contribute to creating a deeper sensitivity to the old and new forms of poverty, to the common good, in which we are all called to participate. May all members of the family community, especially children, the elderly, the weakest, feel the warmth of this feast and may it extend subsequently to all the days in the year.

May Christmas be a feast of peace and joy for everyone: joy in the Birth of the Saviour, the Prince of Peace. Like the shepherds, let us hasten toward Bethlehem from this very moment. In the heart of the Holy Night, we too will be able to contemplate the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, together with Mary and Joseph (cf. Lk 2: 12, 16). Let us ask the Lord to open our hearts, so that we may enter into the mystery of his Birth. May Mary, who gave her virginal womb to the Word of God, whom as Mother she contemplated as a baby in her motherly arms and whom she continues to offer to everyone as the Redeemer of the world, help us make this Christmas an opportunity for growth in the knowledge and love of Christ. This is the wish that I express with affection to all of you who are present here, to your families and to all your loved ones.

Happy Christmas to you all!

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### **To special groups**

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking pilgrims and students present at this Audience, especially those from the United States of America. Upon you and your loved ones, I invoke the Lord's Blessings of health and joy during this holy Season.

I then want to greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. A few days before the Solemnity of Christmas, may the love which God manifests to humanity in Christ's birth increase in you, dear *young people*, the desire to serve your brothers and sisters generously. May it be for you, dear *sick people*, a source of comfort and serenity, because the Lord comes to visit us, bringing consolation and hope. May it inspire you, dear *newly-weds*, to reinforce your promise of love and reciprocal fidelity.