



# The Holy See

---

JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 2 January 2002*

## ***Contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation***

1. At this first meeting of the new year, the day after the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, and the World Day of Peace, we want to renew our thanksgiving to God for the countless benefits with which, every day, he enriches our lives. At the same time, let us prolong our contemplation of the great mystery of the Incarnation that we are living these days, the heart of the liturgical season.

Reflecting on the expression of John, "*the Word became flesh*" (Jn 1,14), the Church in her doctrinal reflection coined the term "Incarnation" to show that the Son of God fully and completely [*pienamente e completamente*] assumed human nature in order to realize in it and through it our salvation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recalls that belief in the true incarnation of the Son of God is the "distinctive sign" of the Christian faith (cf. n. 463).

It is what we profess with the words of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: and by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man".

2. In the birth of the Son of God from the virginal womb of Mary, Christians recognize the infinite descent of the Most High to man and the whole of creation. In the Incarnation, God comes to visit his People: "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David*" (Lk 1,68-69). God's visit is never ineffective: he frees us from affliction and gives us hope, he brings us salvation and joy.

In the account of the birth of Jesus, we see that the glad news of the coming of the long-awaited

Saviour is first brought to a group of poor shepherds as the Lukan Gospel relates: "*An angel of the Lord appeared to them*" (Lk 2,9). In this way St Luke, who is certainly the "Evangelist" of Christmas, wants to stress God's goodness and kindness for the humble and the lowly, to whom he manifests himself and who are usually better disposed to recognize and welcome him.

The sign given to the shepherds, the manifestation of the infinite majesty of God in a Child, is full of hope and promise: "*This will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger*" (Lk 2,12).

This sort of message has an immediate echo in the humble, willing hearts of the shepherds. For them, the words that the Lord made known to them were real, they were an "event" (cf. Lk 2,15).

Thus they set out without delay, they found the sign promised to them and right away they became the first missionaries of the Gospel, spreading around them the Good News of the birth of Jesus.

3. In these days we have heard again the hymn of the angels in Bethlehem: "*Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to the men whom he loves*" (Lk 2,14). This hymn must also be spread through the world that brings great hopes and extraordinary openings in every field but is also charged with strong tensions and difficulties. If in the new year that has just begun, humanity is to proceed on the paths of peace as soon and as surely as possible, all have to make an effective contribution.

Yesterday, on the World Day of Peace, I wished to emphasize the link between peace, justice and forgiveness. Truly "*there is no peace without justice*" and "*there is no justice without forgiveness*"! A strong desire for reconciliation must grow in everyone, built on a sincere will to forgive. May our prayers throughout the year become more powerful and more insistent, to obtain from God the gift of peace and brotherhood, especially in the sorely tried areas of the planet.

4. Let us enter the new year with confidence, imitating the faith and docility of Mary, who keeps and ponders in her heart (Lk 2,19) all the marvels that happened under her eyes. God himself, through his Only-begotten Son, brings about the full and definitive salvation of all humanity.

Let us contemplate the Virgin as she cradles Jesus in her arms, to give him to all mankind. Like her, let us contemplate and cherish in our hearts the great things that God does day by day in history.

Thus we will learn to recognize in our daily lives the constant intervention of divine Providence that guides everything with wisdom and love.

Once again, I wish you a Happy New Year!

\* \* \* \* \*

*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:*

Today I wish to extend a special welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially from Norway, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. A blessed New Year to you all!

---

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana