



The Holy See

URBI ET ORBI

Christmas Day, 25 December 1999

1. *"To us a child is born,
to us a son is given" (Is 9:6).*

Today the "good news" of Christmas
rings out in the Church and in the world.
It rings out in the words of the Prophet Isaiah,
called the "evangelist" of the Old Testament,
who speaks of the mystery of the redemption
as if he saw the events of seven centuries later.
Words inspired by God, surprising words
which come down through history,
and today, on the threshold of the Year 2000,
re-echo all through the earth,
proclaiming the great mystery of the Incarnation.

2. *"To us a child is born".*

These prophetic words are fulfilled
in the narrative of the Evangelist Luke,
who describes the "event", full of ever new wonder and hope.
On that night in Bethlehem,
Mary gave birth to a Child, whom she called Jesus.
There was no room for them in the Inn;
and so the Mother gave birth to the Son
in a stable, and laid him in a manger.
The Evangelist John, in the Prologue of his Gospel,
penetrates the "mystery" of this event.
The One born in the stable is the eternal Son of God.

He is the Word who was in the beginning, the Word who was with God,
the Word who was God.

All things that were made were made through him (cf. *Jn* 1:1-3).

The eternal Word, the Son of God,
took the nature of man.

God the Father "*so loved the world
that he gave his only Son*" (*Jn* 3:16).

When the Prophet Isaiah says: "*to us a child is born*",
he reveals, in all its fulness, *the mystery of Christmas*:
the eternal generation of the Word of the Father,
his birth in time through the work of the Holy Spirit.

3. The circle of the mystery widens:

the Evangelist John writes:

"*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (*Jn* 1:14);
and he adds: "*to all who received him, who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God*" (1:12).

The circle of the mystery widens:

the birth of the Son of God is the sublime gift,
the greatest grace for man's benefit
that the human mind could ever have imagined.

Remembering the birth of Christ on this holy Day,
we live, together with this event,

the "*mystery of man's divine adoption*"
through the work of Christ who comes into the world.

For this reason, Christmas Night and Christmas Day
are perceived as "sacred" by those who seek the truth.

We Christians profess them to be "holy",
because in them we recognize
the unmistakable stamp of the One who is Holy,
full of mercy and goodness.

4. This year there is yet another reason
which makes more holy this day of grace:
it is *the beginning of the Great Jubilee*.

Last night, before Holy Mass,

I opened the Holy Door of the Vatican Basilica.

A symbolic act, which inaugurates the Jubilee Year,
a gesture which highlights with singular eloquence
something already present in the mystery of Christmas:
Jesus, born of Mary in the poverty of Bethlehem,

He, the Eternal Son given to us by the Father,
is, for us and for everyone, the Door!
The Door of our salvation,
the Door of life,
the Door of peace!

This is the message of Christmas and the proclamation of the Great Jubilee.

5. We turn our gaze to you, o Christ,
Door of our salvation,
 as we thank you for all the good of the years,
 centuries and millennia which have passed.
 We must however confess
 that humanity has sometimes sought the Truth elsewhere,
 invented false certainties, and chased after deceptive ideologies.
 At times people have refused to respect and love
 their brothers and sisters of a different race or faith;
 they have denied fundamental rights to individuals and nations.
 But you continue to offer to all the splendour of the Truth which saves.
 We look to you, O Christ, *Door of Life,*
 and we thank you for the wonders
 with which you have enriched every generation.
 At times this world neither respects nor loves life.
 But you never cease to love life;
 indeed, in the mystery of Christmas, you come to enlighten people's minds,
 so that legislators and political leaders,
 men and women of good will, may be committed
 to welcoming human life as a precious gift.
 You come to give us the Gospel of Life.
 We lift our eyes to you, O Christ, *Door of peace,*
 as, pilgrims in time,
 we visit all the places of grief and of war,
 the resting places of the victims
 of brutal conflicts and cruel slaughter.
 You, Prince of Peace,
 invite us to ban the senseless use of arms,
 and the recourse to violence and hatred
 which have doomed individuals, peoples and continents.

6. *"To us a son is given".*

You, Father, *have given us your Son.*
 And you give him to us again today,

at the dawn of the new millennium.

For us he is the Door.

Through him we enter a new dimension

and we reach the fulness of the destiny of salvation

which you have prepared for all.

Precisely for this reason, Father, you gave us your Son,

so that humanity would know what it is that you wish to give us in eternity,

so that human beings would have the strength to fulfill

your mysterious plan of love.

Christ, Son of the ever Virgin Mother,

light and hope of those who seek you even when they do not know you,

and of those who, knowing you, seek you all the more.

Christ, you are the Door!

Through you, in the power of the Holy Spirit,

we wish to enter the third millennium.

You, O Christ, are the same yesterday, today and for ever (cf. *Heb 13:8*).