

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE,  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
MIDNIGHT MASS (MISSA IN NATIVITATE DOMINI IN NOCTE) 2022  
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION  
WASHINGTON, DC**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, in the name of the Holy Father, I want to wish you and your loved ones a blessed and peace-filled Christmas. *Today in the City of David a Savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord!* What joy these words bring to the ears of people around the world and to those gathered here in this Basilica or watching on television or internet. To all, I express the closeness and spiritual affection of Pope Francis, assuring you of his prayers. I too am happy to be with you in this beautiful Basilica in the capitol city of your country. May the peace and the blessings of the Christ Child be with you today and throughout the year.

Tonight, the evangelist St. Luke takes us deep into the mystery of the conception of God's Son in the womb of the Virgin. The Angel of the Lord had already appeared to Mary and received her consent to become the mother of the Lord. The exchange between Mary and the Angel has deep roots in the Old Testament. We cannot separate the revelation and interaction of God with humanity in his presence among the people of Israel. If we were to do so, we would fail to grasp the continuity of God guiding his people gradually into the fullness of a Covenantal relationship with him.

Rejecting God's revelation to the Hebrews can too easily lead us into a rejection of those people whom he nurtured and guided for millenia. Pope Francis has drawn our attention to this problem in an address on December 12 of this year"

"In these hostile times, in which attitudes of closure and rejection of the other are becoming more numerous, not least with the worrying resurgence of anti-semitism...."  
(POPE FRANCIS, "ADDRESS TO MEMBERS OF 'AMITÉ JUDEO-CHRÉTIENNE DE FRANCE, 12 DECEMBER 2022)

Mary and her Son were both members of the Jewish people. How much we should appreciate those whom the Lord was present to and guided into the "fullness of time", giving to us our redeemer!

We are also aware of the circumstance that Joseph and Mary encountered at their arrival in Bethlehem. They were travelers obeying the orders of the emperor yet found themselves without lodging or care for an expectant mother. In our own day and age, the needs of women must be addressed and provisions made for their care and the care of their children. This holy season reminds us that it is not enough to advocate for the lives of their children, but we must also walk with those in need, accompanying them and providing them not only adequate material assistance but especially personal care and affection. In the Church and as the Church, we must always make "room at the inn" for those in need.

The Gospel always leads us into truths about our society and our place within it. When Mary's child is born in Bethlehem, the angels of the Lord announced the event to the shepherds in the fields. It was not to the mighty and powerful of the world that He appeared, but to the meek and lowly. It was to these simple shepherds that God drew near. He called them through the message of an Angel.

They were in the fields outside Bethlehem – at the peripheries – living in poverty, working hard under the burdens of the day – when the Heavenly Messenger suddenly appeared to them. They saw the glory of the Lord all around them and were filled with great fear, but the Angel told them immediately of the Holy Birth. He brought them a message of great joy. That same Angel speaks to us today: *Do not be afraid. Today in the City of David a Savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord!* (Luke 2:10)

Rather than being paralyzed in fear, the shepherds said to each other: *“Let us go to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place that the Lord has made known to us.”* (Luke 2:15) They went with haste and were overcome with joy to find Mary and Joseph and the Child. *The grace of God had appeared.* In the midst of the misery that surrounded them, they encountered Joy in the face of a little Child!

It is this personal encounter with Christ that changes everything – that opens up new horizons; that moves the shepherds, and us with them, from fear to joy; from despair to hope; that moves hearts from sin to repentance. The shepherds were captivated by what they saw: the poverty, simplicity, and the innocence of the Child with His Mother. Their joy was overwhelming! They had not been deceived by the angel. They contemplated and felt in their hearts the presence of the Savior who had descended from heaven to be with them! Yes. The shepherds saw the face of Mercy in a tiny Child, and it changed them.

Just as God saw the plight of the poor shepherds and was attentive to them, so too, we the Church must be attentive to the needs of the poor and aware of their privileged position within the community of believers and in the Kingdom of God.

Christmas is also a time, not only of celebration with family and friends, but also a time for the renewal of faith and hope in the promises of Christ. Mary is an example of that deep faith and great hope. Jesus came into the world at the Annunciation. Mary was His earthly vessel and His life source for the nine months she carried him in her womb. He was among us but buried deeply inside the humanity of His mother. He was unseen and unknown. Mary knew of His presence in the world, but in hope and in trust she guarded this mysterious presence within herself until her hope (and the hope of her people) was fulfilled on Christmas Day: the day when the Lord finally, after months of a hidden life, came forth into the world.

The Fathers propose Mary as the model and the icon of the Church. For us then, the Church must also carry the Christ deep within, while, at the right moment, giving Him forth to the world, while waiting in deep hope for Him to manifest Himself once again in the Second Coming. Tonight, we celebrate with joy Jesus’ first coming, so too must our celebration extend into the whole world as a witness to a joyful love and care we manifest in His name to the peoples of our local communities and to the world.

Our celebration of Christmas is not just a renewal of faith in Jesus Christ and an experience of good will in our hearts. It can also be a time of a renewal of the human spirit and a reaffirmation of the human possibility to extend peace and care throughout the world. Tonight, as we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, we also remember the people of Ukraine, those in the Holy Land, the Sudan and Eritrea and other war-torn places. Their suffering casts a shadow over the beauty of humanity and God’s creation. May our lives, prayers, and faith offer hope that they may soon experience that peace which the Lord came to bring to the world.

I want to personally wish you great hope and great trust in this season of peace. May Christ, who was born a Child in Bethlehem, reign in your hearts and homes, bringing to you and your families, the gift of His peace. Merry Christmas!