

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, in the name of the Holy Father, I wish you and your loved ones a blessed and peace-filled Christmas. I express the personal closeness and spiritual affection of Pope Francis and assure you of his prayers during this holy and joyful season in which we celebrate the birth of our Savior.

Actually, the mysteries of the Christmas season celebrate not only Jesus' birth, but also the mysteries of His childhood, including His Presentation, the Flight into Egypt, His Finding in the Temple as a young man, and finally, His Baptism by John in the Jordan River, after which He begins His public ministry. Following the recent Youth Synod, our Holy Father wrote: "Jesus is 'young among the young in order to be an example for the young and to consecrate them to the Lord'." (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *CHRISTUS VIVIT*, 25 MARCH 2019, 22)

About one month ago, I was in Indianapolis for the National Catholic Youth Conference with about 20,000 young people. Their zeal for the Lord and the Faith reminded me of the Eternal Youth of Christ. Whether in their joyful singing or their prayerful silence in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, they seemed to me to be just what the Church needs today.

In referring to the Mystery of the Incarnation, St. Irenaeus of Lyon says that "He has made all things new in bringing Himself." These young people teach the whole Church that the event of the Word becoming Flesh is not something that happened two thousand years ago and stopped. The young people were responding to the call to live the Mystery of the Incarnation by being the "now of God."

Many say that young people are the future of the Church. The Holy Father disagrees, writing that "They are its present; even now, they are helping to enrich it." (CV, 64). Young "can offer the Church the beauty of youth by renewing her ability to 'rejoice with new beginnings, to give unreservedly of herself, to be renewed and to set out for ever greater accomplishments.'" (CV, 37)

At Christmas, we celebrate the beginning of something new – our Redemption. God is with us, and He comes to save us. This is the joyful message that first came to the shepherds and the Magi and went out to all the earth. There was a proclamation of faith that the Word became Flesh. Christianity is essentially an announcement of an Event, not something that simply happened two thousand years ago, but that is alive, that proposes something new – something that opens us to the Mystery of God and His Plan. Christianity is an announcement of an Event – of the Person of Christ who comes to save us.

If you – if we – are to attract new disciples, renewing the youthfulness of the Church, it must be by proclaiming the essential truths – the God became man; that He suffered in the flesh us; and that He rose from the dead. Speaking to young people, Pope Francis reminds us of three great truths: **God loves you; Christ is your Savior; and He is alive!**

God loves you. He loves you, even if we sin or disappoint Him or others. Pope Francis asks us to "Trust the memory of God. His memory is not a 'hard disk' that 'saves' and 'archives' all our data. His memory is a heart filled with tender compassion, one that finds joy in deleting every trace of evil." (cf. CV, 115) In the Gospels of Christmas, the image of God is not one of Wrath but of the tenderness of a Child.

Christ is your Savior. Jesus comes to save humanity. We live in a throwaway culture in which even people are discarded and excluded. The slaughter of the Holy Innocents reminds us of threats to human life, yet Christ lives! The Pope invites us to reflect on, “How valuable you must be, if you were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ! ... You are priceless!” (CV, 122) Pope Francis immediately exhorts us to keep our eyes fixed on the outstretched arms of the Crucified One. He, who was born in Bethlehem, reconciles and saves at Calvary.

He is not the God of the dead, but of the living! ***Christ is alive!*** The Holy Father wants us to examine whether faith in the Risen Lord impacts our humanity, changes us, and helps us live differently. He writes:

“Christ is alive! We need to keep reminding ourselves of this, because we can risk seeing Jesus simply as a fine model from the distant past, as a memory, as someone who saved us two thousand years ago. But that would be of no use to us: it would leave us unchanged; it would not set us free. The one who fills us with his grace, the one who liberates us, transforms us, heals and consoles us is someone fully alive.” (CV, 124)

This Christmas, it is my prayer that the Mystery of Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, may be alive in you and in your families! Just as the young Christ was the “now of God” at Bethlehem, so may we be the “now of God” in our world, bringing to others a joyful message: *for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*”