



## ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF REGINA OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

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2023

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, dear friends, dear parishioners of the parishes of the Archdiocese of Regina: We live in incredibly challenging times, when deep-founded hope is elusive. These days when we watch the news, with accounts of war and images of human suffering and brokenness, and when we see chaos in approaching solutions, it is so easy to ask where God is to be found in the midst of it all. By contrast, we go into stores or listen to the radio, and see bright shiny decorations and hear jingly and jolly Christmas songs which tell us that we should be happy, and that we should shop for beautiful gifts. There is nothing wrong with that *per se*, and some of it is outright good, joyful and beautiful. But it doesn't take us to the heart of what we are celebrating with the Incarnation, the birth of the Christ child.

Christmas isn't intended to be a happy but short-lived little escape from the difficulties of our lives. Nor is it meant to uproot us from the here and now and put us mystically into a place where God dwells in bliss untouched by human suffering. In the words of one Christian writer, "The incarnation does not provide us with a ladder by which to escape from the ambiguities of life and scale the heights of heaven. Rather, it enables us to burrow deep into the heart of planet earth and find it shimmering with divinity" (Avery Dulles).

Christmas has the possibility to fill us with a deep joy because it brings the assurance that God is with us, where we dwell. It promises, in a way that is more fully grasped with the Resurrection and Pentecost, that God desires to be with us in the here and now, in a life-giving relationship which informs every part of our lives. A relationship with God doesn't mean your life is going to be always happy and easy. The way that Jesus shows us passes through the cross, the complete giving of self in response to the brokenness of the world. But Christ's coming among us in the Incarnation, his rising from the dead, the sending of the Holy Spirit, all speak of God's commitment to be with us at every moment of our lives. Christ's embracing of humanity is God's promise of a relationship with us always. And it is an invitation for us to fully embrace our humanity and our place in the world with courage, perseverance, and trust.

During the Advent and Christmas seasons, we also ponder Mary, who courageously welcomes what God asks of her in carrying and giving birth to the Christ child. A few days ago a friend sent me an extraordinary poem that I had never read, called *The Annunciation*, by Denise Levertov. Speaking of what God asks of Mary, she writes:

to bear in her womb infinite weight and lightness;  
to carry in hidden, finite inwardness, nine months of eternity;  
to contain in slender vase of being, the sum of power  
- in narrow flesh, the sum of light.

Then bring to birth, push out into air, a man-child needing, like any other, milk and love

- but who was God.

Friends, as you prepare for the celebration of the Lord's birth, and through this Christmas season, I encourage you to take some quiet time to feel God's presence, to ponder this mystery of God's desire to draw near to us, to take some time to speak with God in your heart, and to open yourself anew to the mystery of encountering a God who loves us and takes flesh to be where we are. May that prayer and encounter and celebration allow you to continue to live in this broken world of ours with a deep hope. For we are not alone, either as individuals or as human race, in this life. Emmanuel, God with us, is ever at our side, not as an idea, not as words on a page but as a relationship to be lived.

Merry Christmas to each and all of you!