



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 3 January 2007*

The joyful event of Christ's birth

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for your affection. I wish you all a happy New Year! This first General Audience of the new year still takes place in the atmosphere of Christmas, which invites us to rejoice in the Redeemer's birth. On coming into the world, Jesus lavished his gifts of goodness, mercy and love upon men and women. As if interpreting the sentiments of the people of every epoch, the Apostle John observes: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God" (1 Jn 3: 1).

Anyone who stops to meditate before the Son of God lying helpless in the crib can only feel surprised at this humanly incredible event; one cannot but share the wonder and humble abandonment of the Virgin Mary, whom God chose to be Mother of the Redeemer precisely because of her humility.

In the Child of Bethlehem, every person discovers he is freely loved by God; in the light of Christmas God's infinite goodness is revealed to each one of us. In Jesus, the Heavenly Father inaugurated a new relationship with us; he made us "sons in the Son himself". During these days, it is precisely on this reality that St John invites us to meditate with the richness and depth of his words, of which we have heard a passage.

The beloved Apostle of the Lord stresses that we are really sons: "and so we are" (1 Jn 3: 1). We

are not only creatures, but we are sons; in this way God is close to us; in this way he draws us to himself at the moment of his Incarnation, in his becoming one of us. Therefore, we truly belong to the family whose Father is God, because Jesus, the Only-Begotten Son, came to pitch his tent among us, the tent of his flesh, to gather all the nations together into a single family, the family of God, belonging to the divine Being united in one people, one family.

He came to reveal to us the true Face of the Father and if we now use the word "God", it is no longer a reality known only from afar. We know the Face of God: it is that of the Son, who came to bring the heavenly realities closer to us and to the earth.

St John notes: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us" (I Jn 4: 10). At Christmas, the simple and overwhelming announcement resounds throughout the world: "God loves us". "We love", St John says, "because he first loved us" (I Jn 4: 19). This mystery is henceforth entrusted to our hands so that through our experience of divine love we may live aspiring to the realities of Heaven. And this, let us say, is also our practice in these days: to live truly reaching for God, seeking first of all the Kingdom and its righteousness, certain that the rest, all the rest, will be given to us as well (cf. Mt 6: 33). The spiritual atmosphere of the Christmas Season helps us to grow in our knowledge of this.

The joy of Christmas, however, does not make us forget the mystery of evil (*mysterium iniquitatis*), the power of darkness that attempts to dim the splendour of the divine light. And unfortunately, we experience this power of darkness everyday.

In the Prologue to his Gospel, proclaimed several times in the past few days, John the Evangelist writes: "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness did not receive it" (cf. 1: 5).

As in the past, the tragedy of the rejection of Christ unfortunately manifests and expresses itself also today in so many different ways. Perhaps even the most subtle and dangerous are the forms of the rejection of God in the contemporary era: from a clear refusal to indifference, from scientific atheism to the presentation of a so-called modernized or better, post-modernized Jesus. A man Jesus, reduced in a different way to a mere man of his time, deprived of his divinity; or a Jesus so highly idealized that he seems at times like the character of a fable.

Yet Jesus, the true Jesus of history, is true God and true man and never tires of proposing his Gospel to all, aware that he is a "sign of contradiction that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed", as the elderly Simeon would prophesy (cf. Lk 2: 32-35).

Actually, it is only the Child lying in the manger who possesses the true secret of life. For this reason he asks us to welcome him, to make room for him within us, in our hearts, in our homes, in our cities and in our societies. The words of John's Prologue echo in our minds and hearts: "To all who received him... he gave power to become children of God" (1: 12). Let us endeavour to be

among those who welcome him. Before him one cannot remain indifferent. We too, dear friends, must continuously take sides. What will our response be? With what attitude will we welcome him? The simplicity of the shepherds and the seeking of the Magi who scrutinized the signs of God by means of the star come to our help. The docility of Mary and the wise prudence of Joseph serve as an example to us.

The more than 2,000 years of Christian history are filled with examples of men and women, youth and adults, children and elderly people who believed in the mystery of Christmas, who opened their arms to the Emmanuel and with their lives became beacons of light and hope.

The love that Jesus, born in Bethlehem, brought into the world binds to himself in a lasting relationship of friendship and brotherhood all who welcome him. St John of the Cross says: "In giving us all, that is, his Son, in him God has now said all. Fix your eyes on him alone... and you will find in addition more than you ask and desire" (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book I, *Ep.* 22, 4-5).

Dear brothers and sisters, at the beginning of this new year let us revive within us the commitment to open our minds and hearts to Christ, sincerely showing him our desire to live as his true friends.

Thus, we will become collaborators of his plan of salvation and witnesses of that joy which he gives to us so that we may spread it around us in abundance.

May Mary help us open our hearts to the Emmanuel who took on our poor, weak flesh in order to share with us the arduous journey of earthly life. In the company of Jesus, however, this tiring journey becomes a joyful journey. Let us proceed together with Jesus, let us walk with him and thus the new year will be a happy and good year.

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I greet the English-speaking visitors, including the pilgrims from Singapore and North America, especially the seminarians from St Meinrad School of Theology. I extend a particular welcome to the group from the American College in Louvain, here to celebrate the 150th anniversary of their foundation. May the peace of the newborn King fill your hearts, making you his witnesses in the world, and may God bless you abundantly throughout the year 2007.

Lastly, I address the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Dear *young people*, I hope that you will be able to view each day as a precious gift of God. May the new year bring to you, dear *sick people*, comfort and relief in body and spirit. And you, dear *newly-weds*, imitating the Holy Family of Nazareth, strive every day to build an authentic communion of love.

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