



Christmas Message 2020

Dear faithful,

This year will be a Christmas like no other! As a world, we have grown a little weary, and with good reason. We are in the midst of a pandemic, and many are suffering as a result, from contracting Covid-19, to the loss of loved ones, or from the consequences of lockdowns and restrictions, including loss of employment, missed medical care, a rise in cases of mental health issues, drug overdoses, fear and anxiety, and separation from those closest to us. The pandemic remains a constant concern, never far from our thoughts. In all of this, we must remember that Jesus does not abandon us. He is Emmanuel – God with us - to satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts, lift us from our weariness, and be the hope we so desperately need. We need Him now more than ever to illumine these days.

The promise of a long-awaited Messiah was fulfilled when “the Word became flesh and lived among us.” (John 1:14) When Mary gave her “fiat” (her yes) to bear the Son of God into the world, our lives were changed forever. Let us not allow the unusual circumstances we are enduring to take away our wonder at the miracle of the Incarnation. The birth of Jesus is not confined to a moment in history but continues every day. Do we believe this is possible? Even now during a pandemic? Let us not allow the current disruption in our lives to distract us from the true meaning of the Christmas season. Jesus is the reason for the season! Jesus is the Word made flesh! If you have difficulty encountering God’s presence, then ask Him to show you that He is real, that He is alive! How different our lives would look if we lived from the awareness that God is with us! If nothing else, the difficulties of this pandemic should highlight even more how much we need Jesus. He is the one we can count on to meet us in our sufferings, and we encounter Him most powerfully in the Eucharist, which is the sustenance we so desperately need. Let us return to Him often in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, so He can renew us with His love.

The Christmas season always draws to our churches people who have been absent for a while. As people approach Mass for the first time in weeks, months, maybe even years, uncertainty may accompany them. Returning to Mass, after being away, may be both physically and spiritually challenging. People are longing for a sense of community and stability, and for the opportunity to encounter or re-encounter the God who cares deeply for us, speaks to us out of love, and reveals His “face” in Jesus – true God and true man. I urge our regular churchgoers to be particularly welcoming of these brothers and sisters who will be visiting our churches for consolation and comfort. Our pandemic protocol committees continue their noble efforts of keeping our churches safe. I urge everyone to co-operate with them in charity, just as I urge our selfless volunteers to truly reflect the love and innocence of the Christ-child, adopting a welcoming and joyful disposition before all who will be gracing the doors of our churches this Christmas. Let us remember that hospitality is not a measure of what we do but a condition of the heart, as we seek to evangelize and provide consolation during a difficult time.

God is not distant but close to us in every way. As we celebrate Christmas, let us be aware that Jesus – God made flesh and dwelling among us – is the hope we seek. He alone satisfies our deepest longing for meaning and purpose, and is the fulfillment of all desire. God has given us so much - the greatest gift of all – His Son. The greatest gift we can give Him now in return is to let Him be born in our hearts over and over again. Let us open our hearts wide to welcome our Saviour this Christmas so that we can truly experience the peace and joy only He can give. Let us give God permission to transform us, our perspectives, our way of doing things so that we could become more and more the person He has called us to be from our baptism. Let us share that joy, peace and love with the people around us so that all may know the true meaning of Christmas!

Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, pray for us! St. Joseph, pray for us!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christian Riesbeck". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John

December 15, 2020