



2015 CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

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As with every Christmas, when we gather to celebrate the Nativity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we commemorate the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God into *our* humanity. Indeed, as St. Athanasius has taught, “God became man that man may become God,” this great Feast reminds us that we were created in the “Image and Likeness” of God and, thus, we have a spiritual and eschatological calling toward divinization or deification (θέωσις). In Baptism, we entered into this great mystery—and into the Divine Life itself—by descending into death with Christ and rising with Christ as new men and women, members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church called to become more and more like God, our Creator, in the communion of the saints.

Yet, this great mystery that we celebrate on Christmas day is rooted in a story of a poor, homeless couple, refugees, but still a man and a pregnant woman lead on a journey of faith and discovery in search of shelter and stability in the midst of fear and chaos. This

great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God is revealed to the world in this story of faith, hope and love surrounded by anxiety and restlessness. What a mystery that God, the Father Almighty, would have his only-begotten Son, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, born to a human mother in a manger in an insignificant town, Bethlehem. “For unto us, a child is born; a son is given!” and “and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6) Tonight, we look for this holy Child in swaddling clothes for our peace and salvation! Amen! Alleluia!

Yes, the Christ Child, the holy Babe of Bethlehem, has come for us, for all of us, for the whole world, as is evidenced by the love that moved the Magi, the wise men from the East, to follow the great Star to the Messiah, in Bethlehem, overlooked by the many because of his humility and the miraculous occasion of his birth that confounded most of the philosophers and sages of the time, but these wise men and the shepherds in the fields were given a special grace, that they might witness this great mystery! (Luke 2:8-20) But, the Church gives us this great Feast as a gift to us every year that we, too, might sing “Glory to God in the highest” and inspired to make our own pilgrimage to Bethlehem, most especially within our hearts, allowing the grace of God through Jesus Christ, to disperse our fear from us that we may be filled with joy in turning away from the darkness and temptations of this world toward the light of salvation!

As St. Augustine has eloquently put it, echoed by St. Bonaventure among others in the Augustinian tradition, we were *formed* by God in creation, *deformed* by the original

sin and *reformed* by the grace of God through Jesus Christ! Amen! In fact, historical temporality reflects the existential movement and restlessness of our own lives. So, Christmas also reminds us of the necessity of grace for our commitment to conversion and to turn more and more to God, the Father Almighty, through Christ, the Son of God, with hearts set aflame by the fire and love of the Holy Spirit!

This tender story, and this great mystery, of the Birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, in Bethlehem is also the revelation of God's love for all of us: Indeed, through the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ, divine love has commingled with our humanity that our human love might aspire to heaven in our reaching toward our fellow brothers and sisters. When we focus on the Christ Child, we find that we can approach the Divine without fear, and love can grow in our hearts, as astonishment in the eyes of the Magi and the Shepherds that came to worship him.

May the blessings of this Christmas fill your hearts with joy, illumine your minds with wisdom and bring peace to your lives! Merry Christmas!

Love and Blessings,

Archbishop Craig