



Chapter – Christmas 2023  
“Peace on Earth”  
Christmas as a Way of Being in the World



Very dear Sisters and Friends,

Christmas has come once again inviting us to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation – Emmanuel: God-with-us. While it is important to celebrate Christmas with lights, decorations, well prepared liturgies, and festive gatherings, we should not forget that the true meaning of Christmas lies in the experiences of love and peace. And the Christmas message is announced by the life of every believer in this world. The birth of Jesus affirms the worth of our human dimension because Christmas is a blessing on all our “flesh” (*sarx*) – “the WORD became flesh and pitched its tent among us” (John 1:14). It leads us to perseverance in grace, in the gift of sharing of our humanity with others every day, especially with those who are in need. Therefore, Christmas cannot be just a day of the year. It must be a way of being in this world that reveals God’s loving presence through our humanity. It is a way of bringing the grace of a loving heart to every encounter and giving hope in every situation of life.

We are challenged by the context of war and violence and the deaths of thousands of children in different parts of the world, especially in Israel and Palestine, the land of our Lord Jesus whose birthday we celebrate at Christmas. I have come across the news that the churches of Palestine have announced the cancellation of all festive Christmas celebrations this year. In this context, the words of Reverend Munther Isaac touch our hearts: “While the world is celebrating Christmas, our children are under the rubble, our families are displaced, and our homes are destroyed.” It is also very symbolic that the Lutheran Church in Bethlehem prepared a manger and placed the child Jesus under the rubble in solidarity with the many children who are under the rubble in Palestine (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023>).



Let us ask ourselves: If Jesus were born in our respective countries and contexts, where would he be born today? What does celebrating Christmas mean to us this year?

God’s love for the suffering and powerless is a recurrent theme in the Bible. Two thousand years ago, Jesus was not born in a rich and powerful nation that had military power and political affluence, but in a land that was oppressed and persecuted by its conquerors. Gospel stories tell us that Jesus was, Jesus is and Jesus will always be in solidarity with those who are afflicted, who are meek and humble. We see it also in the person of Mary, the humble handmaid of the Lord (Luke 1:48) and it is realized in the Incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus who was humbled himself even unto the death on a cross (Phil 2:6-8).

The Christmas angels’ message gives hope to the world: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace!” (Luke 2:14). This message of peace (*shalom*) radiates the graciousness and blessedness of Christmas and invites us to build peace in our local contexts and give hope to a better world that reveals God’s glory (*doxa*), the experience of God’s gracious love.

The angels’ message – “peace on earth” – is a timeless aspiration that has been echoed throughout human history, serving as a universal dream that transcends cultural, religious, and geographical boundaries. The message gives us a vision of a different world where conflicts are resolved through constructive dialogue rather than violent reactions, where people live together harmoniously celebrating diversity, where the interconnectedness of all living beings and the planet is respected, and where the well-being of all living beings is a priority for all.

The Christmas story must continue in and through our lives and commitments. As Helen Rice once said: “Peace on earth will come to stay, when we live Christmas every day.” How can we live Christmas every day? How can we activate Christmas grace among us? How can we allow God’s grace to come alive in and through our attitudes, words, and actions?

In our present world, marred by conflict, inequality, and injustice, achieving “peace on earth” is a complex and multifaceted challenge. In this context, it is imperative to address issues such as human rights violations, cultural divisions, political tensions, economic disparities, and environmental degradation. We are again invited to be promoters of non-violence (*ahimsa*) which is not passive inaction; rather, it is a dynamic force that challenges injustice and violence through peaceful means (Mahatma Gandhi). It seeks to transform both individuals and societies, emphasizing the importance of love, compassion, and equity as powerful tools for creating a more just and peaceful world. This is how I understand Saint Marie Eugenie’s vision of the “social reign of Jesus Christ” (Advent 1882, for example).

While achieving "peace on earth" may seem like an impossible task, it is worth recalling that small acts of peace and kindness can have a ripple effect. Let us begin by putting our own houses in order. By embracing the principles of small acts of kindness in our everyday lives – whether in our communities, our families, or our parishes – we contribute to the collective effort to create a more peaceful world. Everyone can contribute to peace by promoting kindness, tolerance, and dialogue in our daily lives. Christmas thus becomes a way of life for us.

I recall the many touching stories of kindness and generosity amid horrendous situations in Palestine as the Israel-Hamas war continues. I find the following testimony of a displaced person from Gaza very inspiring and challenging:

Our host family surprises me. Despite all the miserable things, and the daily struggle to secure bread, drinking water and water for toilets and washing; the struggle of dealing with fear, stress, and uncertainty, they manage to gather – grandparents, children, the wife of the oldest, and three grandchildren – and for an hour or two at night they talk, laugh, and sometimes sing and play games. ... Lying on the couch reflecting on my day, I am glad that amid all the misery, there is still a space for acts of kindness, signs of hope, and moments of joy. I believe that hope is an inner feeling; but from time to time, it should be a decision. And tonight, I choose to be hopeful. I close my eyes to try to relax, and I hope for a better tomorrow (From Gaza Diary, part 26 [[www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)]).

This is indeed the spirit of Christmas and it gives us hope for a better world. We are surrounded by many personal experiences of acts of kindness and moments of joy amidst all our problems, challenges, and difficulties in life. We can also recall experiences of the grace of peace irrespective of the circumstances in which we live our daily lives. May I invite you to share a personal story of a time that you experienced the “grace of peace” in the midst of pain and turmoil.

May peace be our gift this year at Christmas. May our sacrifices and prayers help replace pain and killing with peace and hope in the world. Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me, let it begin with my community and my family.

May Christmas and Grace of Peace become a Way of Life for us!

With every prayer for a peaceful Christmas and a blessed New Year – 2024!



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