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Christmas Chapter 2018

Very dear Sisters and Friends,



Christmas is around the corner and we look forward to its festive celebrations. The mystery of the Incarnation played an important role in the spiritual life of Saint Marie Eugenie. This is our first Christmas after the General Chapter which invited us to live constantly under the guidance of God, to deepen communion among ourselves and to go to the peripheries. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of my reflections on Christmas based on what the Gospels say about the birth of Jesus and how we could celebrate it this year.

GOSPELS AND CHRISTMAS

Each evangelist has a different portrait of Jesus and his origins. Mark begins with the baptism of Jesus and is silent about Jesus' birth. Matthew describes Jesus' birth and early life which in many ways resemble the stories about the birth and life of Moses. Jesus was born in Bethlehem but had to escape to Egypt as king Herod sought to kill him just as the Egyptian Pharaoh sought to kill Moses. Jesus is portrayed as the virgin Mary's son, whose name is Emmanuel – *Immanu El*, which means "God with us" (Mt 1:22-23). According to the evangelist Luke, the first Christmas was a wearied, anxious, nervous and lonely day for the young couple – Mary and Joseph as they could not find a place to spend the night (Luke 2:1-7). Bethlehem was crowded with travellers and the inhabitants of the village. An inn keeper finally allows them to stay in a cowshed with the animals. That night a baby named Jesus was born for the world as a gift of God's love. So, Jesus was born on a **journey** and the angels sang glory to God and the shepherds praised God (Luke 2:8-20).

What we find in the prologue to John's Gospel is God's **journey** from the heavens to the earth, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:9). "The WORD (*logos*) became flesh and pitched its tent (*eskēnōsen*) among us" (John 1:14). The WORD of God (*dabar Yahweh*) symbolizes God's presence that was active in God's creative work, in the experiences of the exodus journey of the Israelites and in the lives of the prophets. This WORD has now become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ who is therefore the embodiment of divine revelation: the visible presence of God in human history. John presents the mystery of the Incarnation as a boundary-breaking moment when the divine encountered the human, the heavens touched the earth, and the sacred merged into the secular.

Therefore, the Incarnation can be seen as **God's migration** from the heavens to the earth, to the **peripheries** of the universe, from the sacred to the secular, and from the divine to the brokenness of our human life. The gift of Emmanuel thus overthrows the systems that

devalue matter, the human body and secular concerns. When we are open to the **ongoing revelation of God** in our daily life, just as God's word guided the people of Israel and the prophets, the gift of Emmanuel empowers us and leads us to the fullness of life. Christmas is about abiding relationships, leading humans to be in **communion** with God, with one another and the cosmos.

CHRISTMAS AND CELEBRATIONS

In line with our General Chapter themes, Christmas 2018 is a special day to celebrate this mystery of **Emmanuel, "God with us"**. Jesus tells us that God wants nothing more than to come to life in us, to become alive in our words and actions at home, at work, at school, in our communities and parishes. And it happens. There are human beings, flesh-and-blood women and men, in whom God is clearly and radiantly alive. Many, especially the poor and the lonely, could experience God's loving presence in Saint Damien of Molokai or in Saint Teresa of Calcutta. All of us could name people about whom we could say, "I have seen God in this Sister, in this woman or this man." In that person's goodness or generosity or courage we knew we were experiencing something of God. A smile can make a big difference in the lives of another. A cheerful giver brings joy and peace. A kind word can touch lives and give hope to our fellow human beings. A listening ear and a caring heart bridge distances and heal rifts. A forgiving attitude builds up families and communities. Then, the words of Saint Marie Eugenie become an experience for us: "Love never says: It's enough." In this way, we shall celebrate Christmas; we shall then make visible Emmanuel – the transforming grace of God's loving presence in our communities and families – in the church and in the world.

I am reminded of the command given to Joshua: "I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). Sisters and Friends, we too are invited to become stronger and more courageous in 2019! Christmas 2018 is another day to give wings to our inner fear, jealousy, selfishness, laziness, negativity, tendency to blame others and our self-righteousness so that they might fly away from us. During this holy season of Christmas, let us move from "being fear-driven to being love-drawn". I will later talk about this inner journey, inner freedom and true joy that comes from within. We don't know what we are going to face in 2019, but there's one thing we do know, God is with us and God will never abandon us. Christmas 2018 is thus a golden opportunity to embrace the incredible love of God and celebrate the reality of God's presence in our personal lives, in the life of our communities and our families. Indeed, the gift of the Incarnation – God's presence with us – makes every day a celebration of love and life!

I wish you all a Grace-filled Christmas and a Blessed New Year!



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