



Christmas Message 2021

“...they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.” (Mt 2:9)

The Christmas Star then and now

The infancy narratives in St Luke’s gospel (Lk 1:1-2:52) fascinate in so many ways. Whether child or adult, imagination is fired, life experiences are evoked, and faith is awakened or revived for many.

On that first Christmas in Bethlehem many journeys of faith came together in adoration of the Christ-child. Guided by the light of a star and discerning the path to follow, shepherds and wise men encountered God incarnate in a child. Falling to their knees in worship and prayer, a new light illuminated their minds and lives. As each arrived at the manger, ‘heart spoke unto heart’ as they encountered the human face of God and the divine face of humanity. This was a graced moment of divine revelation that would change their lives forever. Today, the light of that Christmas star beams into our lives, wherever we are on our own life’s journey.

Mary and Joseph: parenting in uncertain times

For their part, Mary and Joseph had already made their journey to the town of Bethlehem. It was a journey marked by hardship and hope, abandonment and promise, desperation and providence. Indeed, many of us can see aspects of our own lives mirrored in their difficult journey.

Despite their fears and the uncertainty of their situation, Mary and Joseph opened their hearts to welcome this precious little infant into the world. Their humble cooperation with God’s plan of salvation led to the most graced moment of human history, when the eternal God took on human flesh. The birth of this child brought joy and new hope into the world.

Still, Mary and Joseph had many more journeys to make together. They had to leave for Egypt to protect the Christ-child from the threat of suffering and death. They returned to Nazareth where they made themselves a home. They accompanied the child to the temple in Jerusalem. Each journey was fraught with hardship and adversity, yet each journey was also a moment of grace.

Journeying Together in faith on a Synodal Pathway

To enliven communities of faith in each diocese throughout the world, Pope Francis has invited us to undertake together a ‘synodal pathway’. On that pathway, guided by the light of divine revelation, and in response in our time to the impulse of the Holy Spirit, we are invited to contribute to shaping our communities of faith as active centers of prayer and worship and as an outreach of God’s loving care for all and especially to those in need and on the margins of life. Pope Francis describes this synodal approach as a way of living the Good News of the Gospel within the community of the Church for the good of humanity and society. As on that first Christmas morning, listening together to and reflecting upon the Word of God will enable us to focus on the reality of God’s presence among us and to incarnate our faith in prayer and pastoral action.

Over this festive season, I encourage you to join our parish communities either in person or online and to pray for one another, for your families and friends. Let us continue to hold in prayer all health care workers and front-line staff as they selflessly and tirelessly continue to care for our sick throughout the Christmas season.

May the blessings of the Christmas Season bring hope and joy into your hearts and homes and provide the light for your pathway throughout the New Year 2022.

+Noel Treanor

Bishop of Down and Connor