



The Holy See

MIDNIGHT MASS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Christmas, 24 December 2000

1. *"Today is born our Saviour" (Responsorial Psalm)*

On this night, the ancient yet ever new proclamation of the Lord's birth rings out. It rings out for those keeping watch, like the shepherds in Bethlehem two thousand years ago; it rings out for those who have responded to Advent's call and who, waiting watchfully, are ready to welcome the joyful tidings which in the liturgy become our song: *"Today is born our Saviour"*.

The Christian people keep watch; the entire world keeps watch on this Christmas night which is linked to that unforgettable night a year ago, when the Holy Door of the Great Jubilee was opened, the Door of grace opened wide for all.

2. It is as if the Church had never ceased to repeat day after day during the Jubilee year: *"Today is born our Saviour"*.

This proclamation, with its inexhaustible power to renew us, echoes once more on this holy night with special force: this is the Christmas of the Great Jubilee, a living remembrance of Christ's two thousand years, of his wondrous birth, which marked the new beginning of history. Today "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (*Jn 1:14*).

"Today". On this night, time opens to eternity, because you, O Christ, are born among us, coming from on high. You came to birth from the womb of a Woman blessed among all women, you "the Son of the Most High". Once and for all your holiness made all time holy: the days, the centuries, the millennia. By your birth, you have turned time into the "today" of salvation.

3. *"Today is born our Saviour"*.

On this night we celebrate the mystery of Bethlehem, the mystery of an incomparable night which is, in a sense, within

time and beyond time. From the Virgin's womb was born a Child, a manger became the cradle of immortal Life.

Christmas is the festival of life, because you, Jesus, born like all of us, have blessed the moment of birth: a moment which symbolically represents the mystery of human life, joining labour to expectation, pain to joy. All of this took place in Bethlehem: a Mother gave birth; "a man entered the world" (*Jn 16:21*), the Son of man. The mystery of Bethlehem!

4. With deep emotion I think back to the days of my Jubilee pilgrimage in the Holy Land. My thoughts return to the stable, where I was given the grace to pause in prayer. In spirit, I embrace that blessed land that saw the blossoming of imperishable joy for the world.

I think with concern of the Holy Places, and especially of the town of Bethlehem where sadly, because of the troubled political situation, the evocative rites of Christmas cannot be celebrated with their usual solemnity. Tonight I would like the Christian communities in those places to feel that the whole Church is very close to them.

We are close to you, dear brothers and sisters, in a particularly intense prayer. We share your anxiety for the destiny of the entire region of the Middle East. May the Lord hear our plea! From this Square, the centre of the Catholic world, let the angels' proclamation to the shepherds ring out once more with new strength: "Glory to God in the highest heavens and peace on earth to those whom he loves" (*Lk 2:14*).

Our confidence cannot be shaken, nor can our wonder at what we are celebrating ever fade. Today is born the One who brings peace to the world.

5. *"Today is born our Saviour"*.

The Word cries in a manger. His name is Jesus, which means "God saves", because "he will save his people from their sins" (*Mt 1:21*).

It is not a palace which sees the birth of the Redeemer, destined to establish the eternal and universal Kingdom. He is born in a stable and, coming among us, he kindles in the world the fire of God's love (cf. *Lk 12:49*). This fire will not be quenched ever again.

May this fire burn in our hearts as a flame of charity in action, showing itself in openness to and support of our many brothers and sisters sorely tried by want and suffering!

6. Lord Jesus, whom we contemplate in the poverty of Bethlehem, make us witnesses to your love, that love which led you to strip yourself of divine glory, in order to be born among us and die for us.

As the Great Jubilee moves into its final phase, pour out your Spirit upon us, that the grace of the Incarnation may inspire in every believer a determination to respond more generously to the new life received in Baptism.

Grant that the light of this night, brighter than day, may be cast upon the future and guide the steps of humanity in the way of peace.

You, O Prince of peace, You, O Saviour born for us today, be with your Church on the road which stretches before us into the new millennium!

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