

Christmas letter Bishop Malesic 2017

Christ's birth gives us hope for peace on earth

“For a child is born to us, a son is given to us;
upon his shoulder dominion rests.

They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero,
Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.” (Is 9:5)

“And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel,
praising God and saying:

‘Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’” (Lk 2:13-14)

Dear Friends in Christ,

We begin our celebration of Christmas with two messages of peace from our Scriptures, one from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah and the other from the Nativity of our Lord as recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

This Christmas, we are again in need of the peace that comes from our savior, Jesus Christ. We need to pray for the peace that we do not have and protect the peace that we do have.

As a sad reminder, this year has been filled with the pain and suffering of natural disasters, including three powerful hurricanes that ravaged the Gulf Coast and several Caribbean islands.

The last few months have seen horrific shootings at a concert in Las Vegas, in a church in Texas and in a mosque in Egypt.

Just over a month ago, I presided at the funeral Mass for Brian Shaw, a 25-year-old New Kensington police officer who was shot and killed while protecting the community.

Throughout the past year, we have continued to bury victims of the ongoing opioid crisis and faced the specter of a nuclear confrontation in Korea.

Many people originally brought to our country as little children now have the very real fear of being deported by our government to a land where the language is foreign to them.

There are many other examples of suffering, and I am sure that all of us have situations in our own lives that could use the Lord's peace too.

We can easily become overwhelmed by the darkness and evil in our world and personal lives. We can begin to despair. But, the birth of an innocent child in a small, poverty-stricken kingdom in the Roman Empire 2,000 years ago gives us hope. When we call on the name of Jesus, he turns his eyes of compassion toward us. His living presence in our hearts gives us the ability to "Have no fear." Often, when I am afraid, I think of the face of that little child of Bethlehem. Jesus gives me comfort — he comforts all who look to him for help. He also challenges us to love one another. What we have received from him, we must freely give away.

Every Christmas we are reminded that we have received the peace of Jesus as a gift, and we must give his peace to others as our gift back to God.

How? Here are a few of the many ways that we show our appreciation of God's great favor in giving us his only begotten Son. Our parishes sponsor Angel Trees and Giving Trees to provide gifts for children who might otherwise not receive any. We collect food for people and families in need and prepare special meals for people who might not have a warm meal at Christmas. We visit the elderly and homebound to share the joy of Christmas. We pray for those who suffer from addiction and work for their recovery. We strive to end poverty and seek justice for those who are oppressed. We march in peace for the protection of unborn human life. And we stand up for Jesus in the disguise of the hungry, thirsty, elderly, sick, imprisoned and forgotten.

This is not merely a matter of politics for us, it is a matter of faith in Jesus who loved us and said, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (Jn 13:15). In terms of the Christmas story, we model our discipleship of Jesus after Mary; like her, we bring the love of Christ to life.

Yet, the meaning of Christmas is not a one-time event. We are called to bring Jesus to life every day in our families, our neighborhoods, our schools and our places of work. We must allow the peace of the Christ-child to live in us always. His love must rule our lives. Our fragile world depends on it.

I will keep you and your loved ones in my prayers, as I always do. Please keep me and the diocese in your prayers. We need them, and I appreciate them. Thank you for your faithful witnesses as disciples of Jesus and for sharing that witness with our world, which is so in need of Him.

As your brother in Christ, I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year.

+ Edward C. Malesic

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