



Christmas Message 2020

“Christmas at Home”

Behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.” Matthew 1:20

On 8th December 2020, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Letter “With a Father’s Heart”¹, dedicating the year ahead under the patronage of St Joseph. The scriptures recall how, in the most difficult of personal circumstances, Joseph took Mary into his home, welcomed the Christ-child as his own and courageously became their guardian. In Joseph, Mary and Jesus witnessed the tender love of God.²

Christmas 2020 is a very different Christmas for everyone. Families and parishes across the world are not able to celebrate in the normal way. For some, this will be a Christmas celebrated at home. Sacrificing much in the pursuit of health and wellbeing, others will spend this Christmas in isolation, unable to join those they love. Like Mary and Joseph, exiled to protect the newly born Christ child, many have been compelled to change their plans at the last minute because of evolving circumstances.

And yet the light of the Christ-Child can still illuminate the hearts and hearths of all this Christmas bringing joy and hope.

This experience will certainly evoke in many of us a nostalgia for the memories of Christmas in previous years, recalling those who were with us in the past, family celebrations and gatherings, Christmas carolling, Vigil Masses and prayers around the crib.

At the same time, the 2020 Christmas experience will cast light on and reveal so much that we have taken for granted. Over this past year, we have all learned to draw upon new sources of creativity and resourcefulness. This Christmas there is the potential to experience and strengthen further our homes as cradles of faith and prayer within our parishes and Christian communities. Just as with the wise men from the East, there is wonder and joy to be experienced – namely, to identify afresh and appreciate anew the personal qualities of those closest and most familiar to us.

So, let us celebrate Christmas at Home. In our homes, let the Christ-child take center place. Over this festive season, I encourage you to join our parish communities online and to pray for one another, for your families and friends. Let us pray also for our health care workers and for all front-line staff as they selflessly and tirelessly continue to care for our sick throughout the Christmas season. And we could use the methods of communication available to us to reach out and connect with those we love and especially those living on their own.

May the blessing of this Christmas Season bring hope and joy into your hearts and homes.

Bishop of Down and Connor

¹ Pope Francis, *Patris Corde* (With a Father’s Heart), Vatican City, 8 December 2020.

² *Ibid*, par. 2.