



WILLIAM T. MCGRATTAN

BISHOP of CALGARY

December 25, 2020

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...” (Is 9:2)

Christmas: A Light of Faith, Hope, and Love in our World

This Christmas Eve we will hear the words of the prophet Isaiah ring out “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light”. How does one begin to describe the experiences of this past year? It is as if a shadow has been cast over our lives by a “pandemic of darkness”. Many here and across the globe have lost their lives to COVID-19 with their families left to mourn their passing, many have survived the virus with lasting effects, and others have risked their lives to provide medical care and to conduct the scientific research leading to a vaccine. It has left many marked by profound sadness, isolation, and fear.

There is also some understandable impatience with the health precautions and restrictions that place limits on our normal ordinary human interactions such as work, social activities, family interactions, and religious gatherings. Yes, we all have had to make sacrifices.

It is into this world, here and now, that God’s love is being revealed. It is a light that comes to us in darkness.

The Nativity of Christ which we celebrate at Christmas is not merely a recollection of an historical event or of a birth which took place in the past. It fixes our gaze on the future, on his second coming at the end of the ages while acknowledging His presence here and now in our lives, each and every day. With the challenges that we have faced this year we might be tempted to give up, to not see Christmas and its celebration through this light of faith, hope and love.

A prayer to the Immaculate Conception beautifully captures the action of God and the docility of our Blessed Mother, “Father, the image of the Virgin is found in the Church. Mary had a faith that your Spirit prepared and a love that never knew sin, for you kept her sinless from the first moment of her conception. Trace in our actions the lines of her love, in our heart her readiness of faith”. God has traced the lines of Mary’s readiness of faith and love through our lives during this Advent season in the acts of love and sacrifice which each of us have freely accepted for the good and the wellbeing of others. They have probably gone unnoticed in the eyes of the world, much like Mary’s “fiat”, which was a simple response of yes to accepting the will of God. In our Catholic tradition, Mary has always been a type or model of the Church’s response to the will of God. As Mary came to believe, to

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conceive and to give birth to Jesus, the Son of God, this same action of God tracing His grace and love in our lives can come to birth this Christmas with a renewed sense of hope.

As St. Ambrose said, “You also are blessed because you have heard and believed. A soul that believes both conceives and brings forth the Word of God and acknowledges his works. Let Mary’s soul be in each of you to proclaim the greatness of God” (Office of Readings, Monday of the 4th Week of Advent). This year as we approach the celebration of Christmas, the *I Am Blessed* campaign of the Diocese is once again an opportunity to witness to our faith despite the suffering we may be experiencing, to recognize the blessings from God in the midst of our daily reality, and to seek out opportunities to be a blessing for others through prayer, giving, and in our acts of service for others.

As we prepare for Christmas, and the octave of this feast, let us rediscover how connected we are to one another. I invite us to experience in this coming year the hope that is found in the promises of God as did Mary. In the words of Pope Francis, Christmas is the feast that “returns us to the horizon of hope, a horizon that does not disappoint because it is founded on the Word of God” (Angelus, 1st Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2013). The incarnate Word, the nearness of God which we celebrate on the Solemnity of the Nativity of Jesus, has transformed human history and can restore in each of us this profound gift of hope.

In this time of pandemic when we look for that light in our darkness, I offer my Christmas greetings and heartfelt best wishes to all the faithful of the Diocese.

I express my gratitude and esteem for the witness of pastoral charity exhibited by the priests and the deacons who exercise the role of Christ the Servant, the presence of the religious communities that offer their unique charisms and a witness to holiness, the co-responsibility of the lay faithful - including the volunteers and parish staff - as a living sign of Christ in the world, the role of the teachers and catechists in our schools and parishes, and the essential gift of family life that is shared so readily in an expression of sacrificial love and an openness to new life. Finally, to those who have both in the past and now serve at the Catholic Pastoral Centre, I am grateful for the dedication and cooperation that is expressed in our desire to be of service to the parishes of the Diocese in these challenging times. May God bestow his blessings upon all of us as we look forward in faith, hope and love to the coming year.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



+William T. McGrattan