

## Christmas 2020

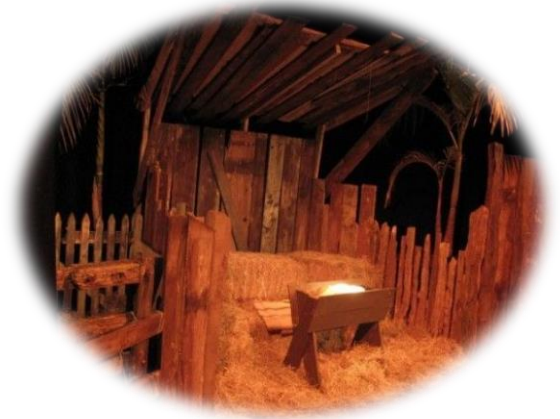
Dear Sisters and Friends,

This is a Christmas like no other! Whatever our circumstances, they are certainly very different from last year at this time. Unprecedented, unusual, inexplicable – a whole new series of Christmas adjectives.

Christmas is always about the interplay of light and about darkness. This year it may seem that the darkness predominates, but it is precisely this deep darkness that can enable us to see the light even more clearly, to experience in a new way that “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5).

The familiar Christmas story is itself full of the unusual and the unexpected; things are not what they are supposed to be. The baby Jesus is sleeping in a manger, a box meant to store animal feed, not to hold babies. There is suffering from the very beginning. It has been suggested that we may have put the comma in the wrong place in the Apostles’ Creed; perhaps we should say, “Born of the Virgin Mary, he suffered, under Pontius Pilate was crucified, died, and was buried.” The Christmas story places before us and invites us into the fullness of the Paschal Mystery, the mystery of life that comes through suffering, even death.

In this strange year, Pope Francis in his recent apostolic letter has encouraged us to reflect in a special way on St. Joseph who is, he suggests, “so close to our own human experience.” St. Joseph knew doubt and uncertainty, fear of the unknown and the unanticipated. Pope Francis writes: “Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, to embrace them, take responsibility for them and make them part of his own history.”



Above all, Joseph demonstrated what Pope Francis describes as “creative courage.” Arriving in Bethlehem and finding no lodging, Joseph took a stable and turned it, as best he could, into a home; faced with imminent danger from Herod, Joseph took action to flee to a safer place in Egypt. In this time of uncertainty, when we feel so strongly that we are not in control, Francis assures us that “this does not mean that we have been abandoned, but instead are being trusted to plan, to be creative and to find solutions in ourselves ... we can show the same creative courage as the carpenter of Nazareth.”

May the blessings, peace and joy of Christmas be with you!

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