

The Christmas Message:
Joy to the world and peace on earth!

In a difficult year when there has been much violence and conflict, the message of the angels at Christmas brings people consolation and hope: “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased” (Luke 2.14).

When the poor shepherds heard this message and grew fearful, the angel reassured them that the birth of Jesus, the Saviour, meant, “great joy for all the people” (2.10).

Canadians will celebrate with joy the Sesquicentennial of Confederation next year. Fireworks will burst over Parliament Hill on New Year’s Eve and at many other times in our 150th year.

Catholics have additional reasons to rejoice. Founded on June 25, 1847, the Archdiocese of Ottawa in 2017 will mark its 170th anniversary and the 70th anniversary of the great Marian Congress held at Landsdowne Park in 1947, our centennial year.

Estimates of attendance at that event range from 100,000 to 250,000. Organizers built a huge outdoor site for the religious spectacular. In front were benches to seat 75,000 people. Its purpose, besides celebrating the Ottawa archdiocese’s centenary, was to pray for lasting peace in the world. Now generally forgotten, in its day it was the largest religious conference in North America, with thousands of visitors coming from all over to take part in the week of prayer. The closing was an event called “the greatest fireworks display ever held in Canada” depicting scenes in the life of the Blessed Virgin.

The Catholics of Ottawa rejoice at the foundations of service laid by our forebears—our clergy, religious, and lay people—who have built our legacy of churches, educational and health care institutions. We rejoice that, from earliest days, the Church of Ottawa has cared for the orphan, the widow, and the stranger. For, in joy, Christians have learned to see Christ in the marginalized, the captive, and the elderly.

Pope Francis constantly advocates joy, notably in his first composition, “The Joy of the Gospel” (*Evangelii gaudium*) and his exhortation on family life and marriage, “The Gladness of Love” (*Amoris laetitia*). Following his lead, during this new Pastoral Year, we in the Archdiocese are continuing to train our spotlight on “the family: home of love, mercy and joy” basing ourselves on St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...” (5.22).

The pope calls us to renew our encounter with Jesus. Joy, we believe, will then flow from this into our interaction with others at home, at work, and in society generally. We hope to be “missionary disciples” to the lost, the suffering, and the broken people in our city and diocese.

We spontaneously rejoice at the sight of a newborn child. Each baby demonstrates God’s creativity and goodness. For Christians, it is also joyful to contemplate the birth of Jesus Christ in the Christmas crèche! In Him, we believe God shines the light of His love into the darkness of the world.

Mary and Joseph experienced the joys and challenges of family life with the birth of Jesus in humble circumstances. Love and wonderment met in this tiny child. Today, we also meet Christ in our family. In times joyful or difficult, He is brought to birth in our homes and hearts.

The true joy of Christmas is the gift of eternal life Jesus offers us through His Cross and Resurrection. We celebrate this miraculous event begun on a dark winter’s night two thousand years ago.

I pray this Christmas that the example of the Holy Family—Jesus, Mary, and Joseph—may enrich your family with gifts of peace, mercy, and joy!