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## **THE BIRTH OF JESUS: THE REPLY OF LOVE**

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE BY ARCHBISHOP CHARLES J. SCICLUNA

In the experience of prayer of the Church during this holy time of Christmas, the theme of light shining in the darkness is a very powerful one. On Christmas night we recall the prophecy of Isaiah who wrote that “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Is 9:1). The dawn of the Lord shone on humanity, on us – the people in dire need of the birth of our Saviour.

Many times during my prayers on these special days, I recall a prayer by St George Preca: ‘Lord God, I need you’ (Sinjur Alla, jiena għandi bżonnok). What a wonderful thing it would be this Christmas if we reflect on this very simple yet profound prayer by this Maltese saint. In front of this infant of Betlehem, in front of Jesus swaddled and lying in a manger by his mother Mary, we look upon the face of God – a vulnerable baby that needs our help – and we tell the Lord: we need you. We need you to teach us how to love each other, we need you to teach us to choose what is good, we need you to teach us and to help us forgive each other.

The world thirsts for peace, it also thirsts for joy. On Christmas night, the angel gives the good news to the shepherds who were held in contempt by the society of the time, and yet the angels singled them out to give them the joyful news: “I bring you news of great joy... Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you” (Lk 2:10,11) and the sign is not anything remarkable or powerful. It is a baby lying in a manger.

In the beginning of December of this year, Pope Francis published a beautiful meditation containing reflections on the Nativity crib. I notice with great joy that we still treasure Nativity cribs in our homes. It was St George Preca himself who wished that a Nativity crib, however small, is found in every home. He taught his M.U.S.E.U.M. catechists that every child attending catechism should be given a little crib or a Baby Jesus to take home. With this gesture, Saint George Preca wanted to impart the simple yet profound meaning of Christmas.

Pope Francis wanted to remind the entire Church about the importance of displaying the Nativity crib in our homes and also in public spaces. The Pope writes about the

figures represented in the crib. He also mentions the stars, the stream, the trees, the grotto of the Nativity, the cow and the donkey, the sheep and other animals that we display in our cribs. The Pope says that all creation worships the mystery of the birth of Christ, of the Son of God made man. He also writes about several figures like the shepherds who welcomed the invitation to approach the manger and who look upon this infant who, as an adult, this Jesus of Nazareth says: “I am the living bread which has come down from heaven” (Jn 6:51). He also says: “I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep” (see Jn 10:11).

If there is anyone listening to me right now, who is burdened by the circumstances of life, I invite you to approach the manger of the Lord and pray to him this profound and earnest prayer: ‘Lord Jesus, I need you’. If someone out there is happy and with good reason, may you share your happiness with your neighbour. What a beautiful thing it is that at Christmas we give each other a gift to remember that we have received the greatest gift of all: God made man. We can look upon him and perceive the answer of love he has for each and every one of us.

The Lord came to quench the thirst for truth and justice, but he also came to teach us mercy, unity and peace among ourselves. May this Christmas find us yearning and at the same time attentive to the true meaning of Christmas: the birth of Baby Jesus.

Our forefathers taught us to tell the Lord not to cry, because we should be the ones to cry for our sins. As we recall our sins we must not lose heart, for in approaching Jesus we remember that he is the one who heals our soul, the source of mercy and peace.

This Christmas we remember that unto us the Prince of Peace was born and the peace in our heart is the greatest gift and the greatest blessing that I wish to each and every one of us. Heartfelt Christmas blessings!

**✠ Charles Jude Scicluna**

Archbishop of Malta