



Christmas Message 2021

“All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.’” (Matthew 1:22-23)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We are living in exceptional times. Every day we watch and wait for the latest news, discoveries of new COVID-19 variants, latest case counts, new restrictions, trying to understand how this will affect our daily lives as the pandemic continues to cause many people so much anxiety, fear, and even division. Yet, amid this uncertainty, we are reminded that there is something even greater to wait for – the coming of our Saviour.

In the scriptures Jesus is given the name “Emmanuel”, which means “God is with us.” In his general audience of April 26, 2017, Pope Francis reminded us that God, “is not an isolated God; he is a ‘God-with. In particular, *with us*, namely, with human beings. Our God is not an absent God, confined to a far-off heaven; he is instead a God “impassioned” with man, so tenderly in love as to be incapable of being separated from him.” Jesus was not born into the world to remain on the sidelines. He cares deeply about each one of us. From the time he came into the world, Jesus has remained with us in every circumstance – including our present challenges. This should give us great hope! Because if God is truly with us, then that changes everything.

More than anything else, the world needs Jesus. He is the source of all our hopes and desires. We do not have to live in fear. By drawing near to him and his Church in the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Confession, meditating on God’s Word in the scriptures, making time for him in personal prayer and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, reaching out to those in need as apostles of mercy, we will experience renewed hope and courage. We will experience Jesus’ tender love consoling us, dissolving our fear, and replacing it with his peace. Renewed by God’s grace we can face the challenges ahead together, as a Community of Faith.

This Christmas let us turn to Jesus as never before, opening our hearts and surrendering our lives to him. May we echo the words of the Blessed Mother, the first to give God permission by her powerful response – “be it done unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). While we relive the anticipation of those who anxiously awaited Christ’s first coming, we look forward to his second coming where his kingdom will be fulfilled. And fully surrendered to Jesus, we wait in joyful hope for his coming into our hearts this Christmas, transforming our lives, our parishes, our diocese, and instilling in us a desire to go forth, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, to make disciples of others.

May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts this Christmas and always!

✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John

December 20, 2021