

BETHLEHEM'S DIVINE LIGHT SPREAD OUT OVER ALL THE EARTH

VATICAN CITY, 25 DEC 2008 (VIS) - At noon today, the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, the Pope gave his traditional Christmas message and imparted the "Urbi et Orbi" blessing from the central loggia of the Vatican Basilica.

Extracts of the message are given below:

"Every Christmas crib is a simple yet eloquent invitation to open our hearts and minds to the mystery of life. It is an encounter with the immortal Life which became mortal in the mystic scene of the Nativity ".

"This proclamation of hope - the heart of the Christmas message - is meant for all men and women. Jesus was born for everyone, and just as Mary, in Bethlehem, offered Him to the shepherds, so on this day the Church presents Him to all humanity, so that each person and every human situation may come to know the power of God's saving grace, which alone can transform evil into good, which alone can change human hearts, making them oases of peace".

"May the many people who continue to dwell in darkness and the shadow of death (cf. Lk 1:79) come to know the power of God's saving grace! May the divine Light of Bethlehem radiate throughout the Holy Land, where the horizon seems once again bleak for Israelis and Palestinians. May it spread throughout Lebanon, Iraq, and the whole Middle East. May it bring forth rich fruit from the efforts of all those who, rather than resigning themselves to the twisted logic of conflict and violence, prefer instead the path of dialogue and negotiation as the means of resolving tensions within each country and finding just and lasting solutions to the conflicts troubling the region".

"This light, which brings transformation and renewal, is besought by the people of Zimbabwe, in Africa, trapped for all too long in a political and social crisis which, sadly, keeps worsening, as well as the men and women of the Democratic Republic of Congo, especially in the war-torn region of Kivu, Darfur, in Sudan, and Somalia, whose interminable sufferings are the tragic consequence of the lack of stability and peace. This light is awaited especially by the children

living in those countries, and the children of all countries experiencing troubles, so that their future can once more be filled with hope".

"Wherever the dignity and rights of the human person are trampled upon; wherever the selfishness of individuals and groups prevails over the common good; wherever fratricidal hatred and the exploitation of man by man risk being taken for granted; wherever internecine conflicts divide ethnic and social groups and disrupt peaceful coexistence; wherever terrorism continues to strike; wherever the basics needed for survival are lacking; wherever an increasingly uncertain future is regarded with apprehension, even in affluent nations: in each of these places may the Light of Christmas shine forth and encourage all people to do their part in a spirit of authentic solidarity. If people look only to their own interests, our world will certainly fall apart".

"Dear brothers and sisters, today, 'the grace of God our Saviour has appeared' (cf. Tit 2:11) in this world of ours, with all its potential and its frailty, its advances and crises, its hopes and travails. Today, there shines forth the light of Jesus Christ".

"God has come to meet us; He has shown us His face, full of grace and mercy! May His coming to us not be in vain! Let us seek Jesus, let us be drawn to His light which dispels sadness and fear from every human heart. Let us draw near to Him with confidence, and bow down in humility to adore him. Merry Christmas to all!".