



2014 CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

The World Council of the Marianist Family

Gloria In Excelsis Deo

On that Christmas night, an angel bathed in the radiant light of heaven's glory, speaking with the authority of God, commanded the lowly shepherds to "be not afraid" and to be of "great joy." No doubt this strange and intimidating "glory from heaven" enkindled in these shepherds' souls a light of joyous expectation which caused them to set out for Bethlehem. They wanted to see the Word that has *taken place* - not the radiant word of the angel, but the Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. This was the Word which was not only something uttered, but something that has been *done* - the Word that is not only heard, but also *seen*!



The shepherds believed the Word. The Word sent them from heaven to earth, from light to darkness, from a supernatural experience of God to the ordinary realm of human interaction; from the splendor above to the poverty below. The shepherds' fearful joy transforms into abounding human joy. Why? Because the Lord God, the Most High, has taken the same path as they have. The Almighty has left his throne of glory behind and gone into the dark world, in the child's apparent insignificance, into human limitations and bonds, into the poverty of the manger. This is the Word *in action*. Not even the shepherds can know the full meaning of all this!

At this moment in our lives, this Christmas 2014, we know that darkness still covers much of our world. Human suffering, whether by natural cause or of our own doing, constantly threatens to crush our joy and dim the light of our hope. We are especially mindful of those who are persecuted precisely because they refuse to abandon the very faith in Jesus which sustains hope. We are also conscious of the cry of those who suffer because of political unrest, poverty, ignorance, violence, disease, and discrimination. These human conditions can often obscure the sound of the angel's "Gloria." And, in our own lives, we are mindful of our own darkness, our own bondage in sin, and need for liberation. Yet, we know that all of us who have been given a share in the joy of the Word made flesh, are sent to be companions of those who are poor, afflicted, and in bondage.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis has reminded us of the *Evangelii Gaudium*, the joy of the Gospel - the "Good News of great joy." It is a joy that is present in our broken and wounded world, but which also transforms that brokenness, because our God has not abandoned us; because God has intimately entered into our lives; because this new "Holy Family," is our family too. As God has consecrated us, by becoming human, our joyous response leads us from awe to gratitude, and then from gratitude to mission. The Churches' focus this year on the sacredness of the *Family* and the gift of *Consecrated Life* call us to live the depths of the divine presence in our everyday lives and human interaction.

Miracles happen along this path, even insignificant miracles, noticed by hardly anyone. The finding of our God as a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger—is this not a miracle in itself? Then there is the miracle of when a particular mission, hidden in a person's heart, really reaches its goal, bringing God's peace and joy where there was nothing but despair and resignation. We are assured that the angel's message will bring us to the place where God's Word is already made man. We are assured that, in spite of all the noise and nonsense, the meaning of Christmas is just as true as it was two millennia ago. God continues the journey toward us, and nothing, till the world's end, will stop God's coming to us and abiding in us.

May the blessings and joy of this Christmas abide with all our brothers and sisters of the Marianist Family. Merry Christmas!

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