



Bishop Francis writes Christmas message 2021:



Two thousand Christmases have come and gone since the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

There, in the midst of danger, uncertainty and among strangers, the infant Jesus, son of God and son of Mary, took his first breath. We are familiar with the story, the main characters, the events leading up to this birth and the events that followed it. Depending on our experience in life, we each can have our own personal reaction to this coming of God among us, as one of us.

This year we face into Christmas with uncertainty about the future. We can look back on a second year when so many people continued to carefully provide services, when our front line workers continued to look out for others, especially those who were isolated and in need of assistance.

In writing of Mary and all that happened to her in the lead up to Bethlehem, Saint Luke tells us that Mary, “treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2: 19). It is an image of Mary in the midst of all the excitement and the danger, calmly recognising that something special was happening to her and to her son.

We often reflect on what we treasure: spouse, partner, children, parents, grandparents, grandchildren and those who are very close to us, they are our treasures because their lives impact on our hearts. Since March 2020, with so much curtailment and threats to livelihoods, many have reflected on what they treasure, what is important to them. Sadly, sometimes our treasure is gone: bereavement can leave us feeling empty and at a loss. We all know the difficult circumstances in which illness and death and bereavement have taken place in recent times. People have risen to the occasion and continue to stand by the roadside and on the streets in silent solidarity with the bereaved.

The absence of another treasure, family members who are away, can leave our Christmas celebration a little sad. Technology can help us to keep in touch, and that is important. Inevitably, as we look at the crib, we think about Jesus in Bethlehem and wonder what this tells us about God and about being human? It has to do with the treasure that God is to us, the treasure that we are to God and the treasure that we can be to each other.

I hope the message of Christmas, that God loves each one of us, will bring us peace and joy and help us treasure what is important. As we give thanks for the baby in Bethlehem, God’s gift to us, and the treasure each person is, I wish you and your family and friends every blessing and happiness this Christmas and a peaceful 2022.

