



Reflection - God's gift of hope

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Christmas, the Feast of the Nativity, speaks of the relationship between God and humanity. Christmas is the feast of the birth of God as a human child, born of a young woman, Mary. Christmas tells of God becoming a human person and entering the ups and downs of the human condition.

We approach each Christmas with the living experience of our personal life's drama. For this reason each Christmas may have a different tone.

Some are celebrated in joy and success, when life for us, our families and beloved is upbeat.

Others are clouded by sadness, suffering, serious illness, debt and financial stress, dejection, or a profound sense of isolation. Unemployment, job insecurity, emigration for work that weighs on family life: all this and more, including the recent violent threats to public safety and security on our streets makes life hard for many of us. Joy seems far away, a thing of the past that's gone forever.

For others among us the Christmas days are also met with a keen sense in our hearts of both the joy and sorrow of life. The lightness of life and the harsh weight of life's crosses

come into sharper focus on the days of Christmas and life and meaning seem scarcely to meet.

From Bethlehem to Calvary and the empty tomb was to be a long and heavy road for the new-born infant Jesus of Nazareth. That road would include home, friends and followers, some who misunderstood, others who set traps for him. It included acceptance and rejection. It passed through a bogus trial, an unjust verdict, crucifixion between thieves, abandonment by all save a few faithful friends. It appeared to end in the empty tomb until the experience by the women and some of his followers of His Risen new life broke the barriers of human experience and understanding. The link between his life and its ultimate meaning dawned only bit by bit on his followers. They struggled to see the eternal meaning of Christ's life, death and resurrection. And so do we.

The birth of God as a human person, uniting the divine and the human, offers new hope, new purpose, new perspectives to suffering humanity. Christmas is the dawn of that new hope. Each generation is invited to make that hope its own and to enact its dynamic in worship, prayer and Christian action. Let us pray in these days that the current efforts led by Dr Richard Haass will lead to fresh and new steps that will energise our political realm.

Christmas is the feast of the barrier-breaking promise by God to humanity : the Word was made flesh and made his tent among us (Jn. 1.14). We have seen His Glory (Jn1.14). The glimpse of that glory in the life and mission of Christ offers us the transforming hope of salvation. He related primarily to the troubled, the lost, the hopeless. His life and

message invite us to cross barriers in order to believe, to understand the stranger in our midst, to make new neighbours, to forgive the offender, to work for peace in justice and charity.

Whatever our state of mind, heart or soul in this December 2013, may this Christmas help us to be at one with God, with ourselves, and with our neighbour. May it empower us in God's grace to cross barriers to new life and hope in the Risen Saviour, born of Mary and parented by her and Joseph, a carpenter.