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“In your daily prayer, ask for peace”

In his 12 February general audience, Pope Francis continued the catechetical cycle on Jesus Christ, our hope, for the Jubilee of 2025, speaking about Jesus' birth and the shepherds' visit.

02/12/2025

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In our Jubilee journey of catechesis on Jesus, who is our hope, today we will reflect on the event of his birth in Bethlehem.

The Son of God enters history as our travelling companion, and begins to travel while still in his mother's womb. The evangelist Luke tells us that as soon as He was conceived, He went from Nazareth to the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth; and then, at the end of the pregnancy, from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census. Mary and Joseph were forced to go to the city of King David, where Joseph had also been born. The long-awaited Messiah, the Son of the God Most High, allows Himself to be counted, that is, counted and registered, like any other citizen. He submits to the decree of an emperor, Caesar Augustus, who thinks he is the master of all the earth.

Luke places Jesus' birth in "an exactly datable time" and in "an exactly indicated geographical setting," so that "the universal and the concrete touch each other" (BENEDICT XVI, *The Infancy Narratives*, 2012, pg. 77). God, who comes into history, does not dismantle the structures of the world, but wants to illuminate them and recreate them from within.

Bethlehem means "house of bread." There, the days of childbirth were fulfilled for Mary and there Jesus was born: bread descended from heaven to satisfy the hunger of the world (cf. *Jn* 6:51). The angel Gabriel had announced the birth of the Messianic King in the sign of greatness: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his

father, and he will rule of the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (*Lk* 1:32-33).

However, Jesus is born a way entirely unprecedented for a king. Indeed, “while they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (*Lk* 2:6-7). The Son of God is not born in a royal palace, but at the back of a house, in the space where the animals are kept.

Luke thus shows us that God does not come into the world with resounding proclamations; He does not manifest himself with noise, but begins his journey in humility. And who are the first witnesses of this event? They are *shepherds*: men of little culture, malodorous from constant contact with the animals, they live on the

margins of society. And yet they practice the occupation by which God makes Himself known to his people (cf. *Gen* 48:15; 49:24; *Ps* 23:1; 80:2; *Is* 40:11). God chooses them as the recipients of the most beautiful news that has ever resounded in history: “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For today in the city of David a saviour has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”

The place to meet the Messiah is a manger. Indeed, in spite of the expectation that precede Him, “for the Saviour of the world, for He for whom all things were created (cf. *Col* 1:16), there is no room” (Benedict XVI, *The Infancy Narratives*, 2012, pg. 80). The shepherds thus learn that in a very humble place, reserved to the

animals, the long-awaited Messiah is born, and He is born *for them*, to be their Saviour, their shepherd. This news opens their hearts to wonder, praise and joyful proclamation.

“Unlike so many other people, busy about many things, the shepherds become the first to see the most essential thing of all: the gift of salvation. It is the humble and the poor who greet the event of the Incarnation” (Apostolic Letter *Admirabile signum*, no. 5).

Brothers and sisters, let us, too, ask for the grace of being, like the shepherds, capable of wonder and praise before God, and capable of cherishing what He has entrusted to us: the talents, charisms, our vocation and the people he places beside us. Let us ask the Lord to be able to discern in weakness the extraordinary strength of the Child God, who comes to renew the world

and transform our lives with his plan full of hope for all humanity.

Appeal

I think of the many countries that are at war. Sisters, brothers, let us pray for peace. Let us do our utmost for peace. Do not forget that war is a defeat. Always. We were not born to kill, but to make peoples grow. May pathways of peace be found. Please, in your daily prayer, ask for peace. Tormented Ukraine... how it suffers. Then, think of Palestine, Israel, Myanmar, North Kivu, South Sudan. So many countries at war. Please, let us pray for peace. Let us do penance for peace.

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(08/16/2025)