RC DIOCESE OF EAST ANGLIA

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PASTORAL LETTER
OF
THE RIGHT REVD ALAN HOPES

To be read out at all Masses the weekend
January 1 / 2 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ

On Christmas night, the angel of God appeared to simple shepherds and invited them to come to a stable in Bethlehem and worship the new-born baby, cradled in the arms of his mother Mary.

The prophets called this child *Emmanuel,* which means God is with us. St John in the Gospel today describes this child as *The Word made flesh and* who lived *among us and we saw his glory, that glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Today The Lord invites us to turn aside again and to worship the Christ Child as we contemplate *this thing that has happened and which the Lord has made known to us.*

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This wondrous thing that has happened is the mystery of the Incarnation which we are celebrating this Christmastide – that in Jesus Christ, God united himself to our human nature and came among us as a man. The holy life in Mary's womb and the baby to whom she gave birth is of someone who existed before all time began. The divine Son of God takes on our human flesh and is born of a human mother. He takes on our human nature so that one day we might share in his divine nature. Jesus Christ is indeed both God and man. The Church rightly calls Mary the God bearer – the Mother of God.

The Incarnation assures us that God is not distant. He is very close to us. In Jesus, he is one with us, sharing in our poverty and sufferings, sharing the life and experiences of each human person, no matter what our histories and mistakes.

God made each one of us. God loves each one of us. That is why he became and man.

Simply speaking, God is love. And true love is marked by gift of self and generosity. We know that many human lives

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are marked with winter darkness. Contemplating and worshipping the Incarnate Son of God in the manger, his arms open wide with love, we cannot but help share that love with others – the love that he so freely and joyfully gives to us.

God made each one of us. God loves each one of us. In the Incarnation he floods our lives with hope.

The country into which the Christ was born, was always on the brink of calamity and conflict, and the people were vulnerable to sickness and unexpected death. They knew that so many things were beyond their power. They sought hope in the midst of uncertainty. As we look around us today we might recognise some of those human needs which need to be answered with love and hope. For hope is the gift our Saviour has given to all his followers. That hopeful Light of Jesus Christ still shines in his Church, as we his people turn aside to contemplate and to worship Him this Christmas.

God made each one of us. God loves each one of us. God fills us with hope.

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At the moment of the Incarnation God pledges that there will be peace on earth to men of goodwill. As we begin the new civic year, we pray fervently with the whole Church that the gift of peace may become a reality for all peoples – all those who are caught up in war and conflict, for all who daily face persecution because of their faith, and all those who do not know real freedom or human dignity in their lives.

Because of the Incarnation our prayer must lead to action:

We must be prepared to support those who are actively working for peace in our world;
to work for reconciliation and peace in our own communities and families;
to be prepared to welcome all who are refugees and who come to live among us.

The Incarnation declares that peace is a gift from God himself – a peace that passes all human understanding.

As we continue to turn aside to contemplate and to worship the Incarnate Son of God in the manger, let us truly allow Jesus Christ to bring his light into our dark winter nights and

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into the dark winter nights of those around us by our sharing of these God-given gifts of love, hope and peace.

I wish you and your families a New Year that is free of fear and filled with love, hope and peace.

With prayerful good wishes,

Yours Devotedly in Christ,

+ Alan S. Hopes

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