



**Emmanuel...God with us.** “The incarnation does not mean that God saves us from the pains of this life. It means that God-is-with-us. For the Christian, just as for everyone else, there will be cold, lonely seasons, seasons of sickness, seasons of frustration, and a season within which we will die. Christmas does not give us a ladder to climb out of the human condition. It gives us a drill that lets us burrow into the heart of everything that is and, there, find it shimmering with divinity” (Avery Dulles).

Blessed Virgin Mary responded to God’s love by her ‘Yes’ to God’s will, by her obedience to God’s Word, thus bringing forth the Incarnate Son of God on earth. She went with haste to be with her cousin Elizabeth in times of need. She was at the service of her cousin in spite of being the Mother of the Son of God. The visit of Mary to Elizabeth describes the true Christmas party celebrated by two women. They shared their holy excitement of the favors received by God. The Holy Spirit led Mary to put into practice, right from the start to the finish, what would become the core message of the Gospel her Son would preach one day: Love for neighbor.

Let Jesus be the center of our celebration of Christmas. St. Francis of Assisi was in love with the Incarnate Son of God and created the nativity scene at Greccio. “I want to do something that will recall the memory of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger, and how the ox and ass stood by” (St. Francis of Assisi). The Incarnate Son of God, who came to live with us, reshaped and redirected St. Francis’s life. As we celebrate Christmas, let us not just wonder and admire Baby Jesus but follow the message of the Adult Jesus to guide and shape our life. We may find it hard and challenging but again remember His name is Emmanuel -"God with us." St. Francis saw the infant Jesus in everyone and everything and that unique relationship made him the servant of God. Let us not leave Baby Jesus in the manger but take Him out of there to where we live and wherever we go.

The kind and thoughtful deeds of giving gifts, sending cards and visits, should strengthen our ties of family and friends. Being aware of the less fortunate around us, sharing our Christmas joy and hope through some charitable deeds would make a difference in the less fortunate. Not only Covid-19 pandemic but many other crises have shaken our common home. In all this, God is with us, He has not abandoned us. It’s a call for us to return to our loving God, take care of each other, share the blessings and favors received, and give hope to all those who have lost their hope in God. So, our program for Christmas is now clear: concern and care for our neighbor is the best way to welcome our Savior and experience the Peace and Joy He brings along. **May the JOY of Christmas be our path forward...Merry Christmas & Happy New Year.**