



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO

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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.30 a.m. in the Paul VI Hall, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian the Pope focused on the theme *Christmas: the surprises God likes* (Bible passage: from the *Gospel according to John*, 1: 9-12).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present.

The General Audience concluded with the recital of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In six days' time it will be Christmas. The trees, the decorations and the lights everywhere remind us that this year too it will be a feast. The advertising machine invites us to exchange ever new gifts to surprise each other. But I wonder, is this the feast that God likes? What Christmas would He want, which gifts, which surprises?

Let us look at the first Christmas in history to discover God's tastes. That first Christmas in history was *full of surprises*. It begins with Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph; the Angel arrived and changed her life. From a virgin, she became a mother. She continued with Joseph, who was called upon to be father to a son he had not generated. A son who – in a plot twist – arrives at the least opportune moment, that is, when Mary and Joseph were betrothed and according to the Law could not cohabit. Faced with scandal, common sense invited Joseph to repudiate Mary and save his good name, but he, despite having the right to do this, surprises: so as not to harm Mary, he decides to leave her secretly, at the cost of losing his own reputation. Then another surprise: God, in a dream, changes his plans and asks him to take Mary with him. Jesus was born, and when he had his plans for the family, once again in a dream he is told to get up and go to Egypt. In short, Christmas leads to unexpected changes of life. And if we want to live Christmas, we must open our heart and be willing to receive surprises, that is, an unexpected change of life.

But it is in the night of Christmas that the greatest surprise arrives: the Most High is a little baby. The divine Word is an infant, which literally means “unable to speak”. And the divine word becomes “unable to speak”. The Saviour is welcomed not by the authorities of the time or the place, or ambassadors, no; but by simple shepherds who, surprised by the angels while working at night, rush to Him without delay. Who would have thought? Christmas is celebrating the *unexpected of God*, or better, celebrating the *unexpected God*, who overturns our logic and our expectations.

Celebrating Christmas, then, means welcoming on earth the surprises of Heaven. One cannot live solely on the earth when Heaven has brought its newness into the world. Christmas inaugurates a new age, in which life is not planned, but given; in which one lives not for oneself, on the basis of one's own tastes, but for God, and with God, because from Christmas onwards God is God-with-us, Who lives with us, Who walks with us. Living Christmas means letting oneself be shaken by its surprising newness. Jesus' Christmas does not offer the reassuring warmth of the hearth, but the divine tremor that shakes history. Christmas is the victory of humility over arrogance, of simplicity over abundance, of silence over hubbub, of prayer over “my time”, of God over my “I”.

Celebrating Christmas is doing as Jesus did, He Who came for us in need, and coming down towards those who need us. It is doing as Mary did: *trusting*, obedient to God, even without understanding what He will do. Celebrating Christmas his doing as Joseph did: *rising* to realize what God wants, even if it does not follow our plans. Saint Joseph is surprising: in the Gospel he never speaks, there is not one word from Joseph in the Gospel, and the Lord speaks to him in silence, He speaks to him in his sleep. Christmas means favouring the silent voice of God over the noise of consumerism. If we know how to stay in silence before the Nativity scene, Christmas will be for us too a surprise, not something we have already seen. Staying in silence before the Nativity scene: this is the invitation, for Christmas. Take some time, go in front of the Nativity scene and remain in silence. And you will feel, you will see the surprises.

Unfortunately, though, we can choose the wrong feast, and favour the usual things of the world over the novelties of Heaven. If Christmas remains only a nice traditional feast, where we are at the centre and not Him, it will be a lost opportunity. Please, do not make Christmas worldly! Let us not set aside the one we celebrate, as then, when “He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him” (*Jn* 1: 11). Since the first Gospel of Advent the Lord has placed us on our guard, asking us not to “be weighed down with carousing... and the anxieties of life” (*Lk* 21: 34). In these days we are in a rush, perhaps more than throughout the year. But in this way we do the opposite of what Jesus wants. We blame the many things that fill up the days, the world that goes so fast. Yet Jesus did not blame the world: He asked us not to let ourselves be pulled along by it, to keep watch in every moment, praying (cf. v. 36).

So, it will be Christmas if, like Joseph, we give space to silence; if, like Mary, we say “here I am” to God; if, like Jesus, we are close to those who are alone; and if, like the shepherds, we come out of our enclosures to stay with Jesus. It will be Christmas if we find light in the poor grotto of Bethlehem. It will not be Christmas if we seek the dazzling lights of the world, if we fill ourselves up with gifts, lunches and dinners but do not help at least one poor person, who resembles God, because at Christmas God became poor.

Dear brothers and sisters, I wish you a happy Christmas, a Christmas rich in the surprises of Jesus. They may seem to be uncomfortable surprises but they are God's tastes. If we espouse them, we too we offer ourselves a splendid surprise. Each one of us has, concealed in his heart, the capacity to surprise. Let us allow ourselves to be surprised by Jesus this Christmas.

Greetings in various languages

French

I am pleased to greet pilgrims from France and the various Francophone countries, especially the young people of Draguignan. I wish you all a Merry Christmas, full of surprises from Jesus! With the help of Mary and Joseph, let us welcome them, and thus make God's tastes our own, letting ourselves be surprised by them. God bless you!

English

I welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, especially those from Australia, the Philippines and the United States of America. My particular greeting goes to Japanese pilgrims accompanied by Cardinal Thomas Manyo Maeda, and to the children's dance team from Ukraine. In these last days before Christmas, I invoke upon all of you, and your families, the joy and peace of the Lord Jesus. God bless you!

German

I cordially greet the German-speaking pilgrims, in particular the Tyrolean *Schützen* group, who have come from Innsbruck with their bishop, Msgr. Hermann Glettler. May the Holy Spirit help us bring the peace of Christmas and Christ's love to the men and women of our time.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims from Spain and Latin America. Let us ask the Virgin Mary to help us to contemplate in silence the mystery of the birth of her Son, so that we may realize in our lives her example of humility, poverty and love. I wish you a Merry Christmas. Thank you.

Portuguese

Dear Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, I greet you all with a wish for a Holy Christmas, bearer of the consolations and graces of the Child God, for you and your family. And it will certainly be thus, if your family can place Him and His Law at the centre of life, becoming a school of faith, prayer, humanity and true joy. I warmly bless you all, wishing you a peaceful and happy New Year.

Arabic

I extend a cordial welcome to the Arab-speaking pilgrims, especially those from Syria, Lebanon and the Middle East. To live Christmas we must transform with love, our hearts into a nativity scene; with prayer, our houses into the manger; and with goodness, our roads into an oasis. May the Divine Child teach us to look to heaven with His eyes and to look at Him with the heart of Mary and the prayerful silence of Saint Joseph. May the Lord bless you and protect you from the evil one!

Polish

I warmly welcome Polish pilgrims. Dear brothers and sisters, I wish you a happy Christmas, full of the peace, love and serenity that the Lord born among us brings us. May living the mystery of the Incarnate Word help you to grasp the surprises and challenges with which Jesus calls us to leave our comfort zone, to be with Him and with those He loves. God bless you!

Italian

I extend a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I am pleased to welcome the parish groups, in particular those of Collevocchio and Alvito and the guests of Caritas in the diocese of Albano, accompanied by the bishop, Msgr. Marcello Semeraro.

I greet the National Association of civilian war victims; the Scout Group of Jesolo and Ca' Savio; the Italian National Amputee football team; the delegation from the municipality of Bolsena; the Paralympic Sports Group of the Ministry of Defence, and schools, in particular those of San Benedetto del Tronto and Bitonto.

I address a special thought to the young, the elderly, the sick and the newlyweds.

The birth of the Lord Jesus is imminent. May the feast that we will celebrate again this year, on the Holy Night of His Nativity, reawaken in us God's tenderness for all humanity, when, in Jesus, He did not disdain to assume, without any reserve, our human nature. Let us entrust ourselves to Mary and to Joseph, so that they may teach us how to welcome such a great gift: Emmanuel, God with us.
