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Greetings to pilgrims: Advent, time of journeying towards the encounter with the Lord

The desire for a fruitful Advent journey, along with the memory of the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception which is celebrated tomorrow, 8 December, were the themes of the Pope's greetings to the faithful and pilgrims from various countries present in the Paul VI Hall during this Wednesday's general audience.

Among the German speakers the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the members and friends of the Schönstatt movement, and those from Lagundo and Bolzano. He greeted the Portuguese faithful from Lisbon, and reminded them, along with Polish speakers, that Mary consoles us in times of hardship and keeps open the horizon of hope. He also addressed French-speaking pilgrims, especially those of the Saint-Régis Saint-Michel College in Puy en Velay, and the members of the service for the refinement of homilies, and Arabic speakers including the group of Iraqi priests who serve in Europe.

Finally, he gave a cordial welcome to Italian speaking pilgrims, including the Missionaries of Charity, the Love and Freedom Community, the Aphasic Association of Puglia and artists from the 24th edition of the Nativity Concert promoted by the "Don Bosco in the World" Foundation, inviting them all to cultivate in every situation of life the theological virtue of hope, a gift from God, Who with His tenderness never ceases to console His people.

"I offer a special greeting to the young, the sick, and newly-weds", he added. "The liturgical time of Advent is an occasion for particular grace, to reflect on our journey to encounter the Lord. May the Virgin Mary, whose Immaculate Conception we celebrate tomorrow, be the model for our inner preparation for the Nativity, so that the heart of each person become the cradle that welcomes the Son of God, face of the Father's mercy, by listening to His Word, through works of fraternal charity, and prayer".