



Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith

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Christmas 2020

Dear Friends, Family and Faithful of the Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith

As I pondered what kind of Christmas greeting I would like to send this year I was all too aware that it has been a time unlike any other in recent memory. Christmas does not feel all that joyful this year. So many of our beloved traditions are being disrupted and even our desire to be with our extended families and friends has to take a back seat for now. While Christmas does not seem like the right season to reflect on hardship and suffering, to ignore our present reality forgoes the opportunity to reflect on the real meaning of the birth of Jesus.

Our savior's birth was not greeted by festive gatherings and holiday celebrations. For the Holy Family it was a time of uncertainty and loneliness. Far from home and with no place to lie down except for a manger and no heat for warmth save for that emanating from the smelly stable animals, Mary and Joseph brought their son into what might seem an impersonal and uncaring world.

Yet on that night, so many years ago, a light was born into the world. It was *"a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower."* (Jn 1.1-19) From that light came the hope that no matter what difficulties we face, no matter what crisis befalls us, God's love for us will help us overcome and, ultimately, triumph.

*How beautiful on the mountains,
are the feet of one who brings good news,
who heralds peace, brings happiness,
proclaims salvation,
and tells Zion,
'Your God is king!' (Is 52.7-10)*

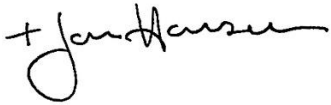
So, as people who have hope, let us enter into this season of Christ's birth joyfully. Let us take time to thank God for our many blessings. Let us be thankful for family, friends and loved ones with whom we would normally share our holidays even if we can not be sharing around the same table this year. Let us be thankful for the bounty from the land and for the gift of peace in a country that provides us with security and welcomes those who seek refuge. Gratitude is our gift to God for all that we have been given. Gratitude is a witness to others of the light that has come into the world.

Let us also keep in our hearts and minds those who do not experience peace and the opportunity to celebrate the Lord's birth in safety. We pray for those who are ill and for those who have died during the pandemic. We pray for those who are hungry and homeless, for those who do not have anyone to love them or pray for them. Where we are able, let us reach out to those in need.

The birth of the savior is the gift of God's love for us all, a gift that keeps giving through us as we live in faith. With Christ, may we be the bearers of love, peace and joy to the world.

On behalf of the diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith I wish you and your loved ones a blessed and Merry Christmas. May your New Year be filled with the bright promises of good health and peace.

Merry Christmas

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon Hansen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Bishop Jon Hansen, C.Ss.R.