



# The Holy Family of Bordeaux in Britain and Ireland

Glory to God alone in Jesus Christ through Mary and Saint Joseph

December 2016

Volume 2 Issue 10

## In this Issue

- 1 Editorial
- 2 Message from Gemma
- 3 New Year Prayer
- 4 New Year Message from Irish Church Leaders
- 5 The Mysterious Christmas Card
- 6 Upcoming Events



## Instead of EDITORIAL

### The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and the princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among brothers,  
To make music in the heart.



Howard Thurman, a mystical Quaker preacher and poet

## Message from Sr. Gemma (Unit Leader)

### LOVE BENDS LOW

**D**uring the Christmas season, we are invited to contemplate the great mystery of the Incarnation – God coming to us in the form of a tiny child, born to poor parents who could not find shelter and safety for the young mother who was about to give birth. Jesus was born into a world that was not very different from our world today. The Jews were under the occupation of the Romans. It was a world torn apart by war, violence, oppression, division and hatred. In becoming incarnate, our God experienced cold, hunger, fear, suffering, persecution and even finally, a cruel death at the hands of an oppressive, occupying force.

The vulnerability of the Incarnation astounds us. The humility of God overwhelms us. *“Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.”* (Phil 2:6-8).

In a sermon on the nativity of the Lord, the medieval theologian St. Bonaventure reflects on *“The Word was made flesh”* (John 1:14). He says: *“These words give expression to that heavenly mystery... that the eternal God has humbly bent down and lifted the dust of our nature into unity with God’s own person.”* (Quoted in Ilia Delio’s [The Humility of God](#), p. 51). For Bonaventure, incarnation is about a God who humbly bends down to lift us up and to unite us with God’s own self. In the Incarnation, God bends over in love to meet us, finite human creatures, exactly where we are. This humble God meets us even in our sinfulness, violent tendencies and selfish behaviours.



God’s humility was exemplified in the life and teaching of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life for all. *“Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart.”* And God’s humility is

also manifest in God’s ongoing incarnation in each human being and in the material world. We know that God is present in every particle of the universe and, as a God who is present in everything, God experiences our joys and our sufferings and is vulnerable to all human experience, whether the humiliation and suffering of a refugee or the despair and rage of a terrorist. God suffers with creation.

In our turn, we are called to model ourselves on Jesus’ humility and to incarnate God’s vulnerability and humility in our world today – a world where racism, xenophobia, exclusion and violence are rife. Yes, this is the mystery of Christmas — a God who is love bending low, so low as to be humble and hidden in the visible faces of each one of us.

There is a story told of a man who asked his rabbi why he couldn't see the face of God. What had happened that he could no longer reach high enough to see God? The rabbi, a very old man, had experienced a lot in his life and was very wise. *“My son,”* he said, *“we cannot see the face of God because there are so few of us who can stoop that low. Learn to bend, to bow, to kneel and stoop and you will be able to see God face-to-face.”*

If we want to see the face of God, sometimes we have to bend low, to look in the very places where we least expect to find God - in the darkness of war-torn Syria and the over-crowded refugee camps; in our prisons and those places where people live in despair. And often we need to look at those places within ourselves where we have to confront our fears, our loneliness doubts and confusion.

God is there too. In fact, there isn’t a place in this world that we or any part of creation can be separated from God’s healing love. That’s the message of the Incarnation. That’s the message of Christmas.



## A Celtic New Year's Prayer

May God make your year a happy one!

Not by shielding you from all sorrows  
and pain,

But by strengthening you to bear it,  
as it comes;

Not by making our path easy,

But by making you sturdy to travel any path;

Not by taking hardships from you,

But by taking fear from your heart;

Not by granting you unbroken sunshine,

But by keeping your face bright;  
even in the shadows;

Not by making your life always pleasant,

But by showing you when people  
and

their causes need you most,  
and

by making you anxious to be there  
to help.

God's love, peace, hope and joy  
to you for the year ahead.

## Irish church leaders' New Year Message

### 'Hope in Christ in uncertain times'

As with all people, none of us are immune from standing at the gate of the New Year and reflecting on what the last twelve months have brought - and wondering what 2017 might bring.

The world is an uncertain place. As we enter this New Year we are mindful of people who continue to suffer as a result of conflict, especially in the Middle East, and the humanitarian crisis that continues to unfold in Syria.

As we pray for these situations, we also remember and lift in prayer those in our own communities who are affected by homelessness and those struggling to make ends meet. As the Psalmist reminds us, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear ..." (Psalm 46:1). It is our prayer that people will look to Him for that comfort and help and see Him move in those who offer much needed practical support.

As Church leaders, last year we remembered together the events of 1916, events that shaped relationships and the future of these islands. A century on, new events of a different kind have the potential to alter political and economic relationships here, as the UK prepares to leave the European Union. It is our united prayer that our political leaders in Belfast, Dublin and London will have wisdom, grace and patience during this process that will have implications for the whole of Ireland.

As we begin our journey through this coming year, we are reminded of the Greatest Commandment that our Lord Jesus Christ gave us: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength ..." He continued, by giving us a second, "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31).

Let us commit to living out His words in these uncertain days as we also remember that our eternal hope is in Christ, at this time and always, we fix our eyes upon Him.

*Archbishop Richard Clarke, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh*  
*Archbishop Eamon Martin, Catholic Archbishop of Armagh*  
*Rt Rev John McDowell, President, Irish Council of Churches*  
*Rev Bill Mullally, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland*

The Archbishop of Canterbury's New Year's Message + video can be can be viewed here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xqt6pblfpki>

## The Mysterious Christmas Card

Christmas is the feast of children and of the Divine Child that hides within every adult. The belief that God came near to humankind in the form of a child is enormously inspiring. Thus no one can claim that it is just an unfathomable mystery, fascinating on the one hand and terrifying on the other.

No. He came close to us in the fragility of a newborn who whimpered from the cold and hungrily sought the maternal breast. We have to respect and love this form in which God chose to enter our world, in a grotto of animals, on a dark and snowy night, "because there was no room for him in the inns of Bethlehem."

Even more consoling is the idea that we will be judged by a child and not by a stern and scrutinizing judge.

What a child wants is to play. He immediately forms an affinity with other children, poor, rich, Asian, black, or blond... He is original innocence because he does not yet know the maliciousness of adult life.

The Divine Child will introduce us into the celestial dance and the banquet that the divine family of Father, Son and Holy Spirit has prepared for all its sons and daughters, without excluding those who once were torn by suffering.

I was reflecting on this blessed situation when an angel like those who sang to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem approached me spiritually and gave me a Christmas card. From whom could it be?

I began to read. It said:

"Dear little brothers and sisters:

if, when looking at the nativity and seeing the Child Jesus there between Mary and Joseph, next to the ox and the mule, you are filled with faith that God became a child like any one of you;

if you are able to see in other boys and girls the ineffable presence of Jesus the Child, who once was born in Bethlehem and has never left us alone in the world since;

if you are able to make the hidden child be reborn in your parents, your uncles and aunts and other people you know so that love, tenderness, and caring for the whole world and also for nature well up in them;

if when looking at the manger you discover Jesus, poorly clad, almost naked, and you remember how many children are equally poorly clothed, and this situation wounds you to the bottom of your hearts, and you can share your surplus and want to change this state of affairs right now;

if when seeing the cow, the donkey, the sheep, the goats, the dogs, the camels and the elephant in the nativity, you think that the whole universe is also lit by the Divine Child and that we are all part of the Great House of God;

if you look up to the heavens and see the star with its luminous tail and remember that there is always a star like the one of Bethlehem over you, that accompanies you, shines on you, and shows you the best paths;

if you remember that the Three Kings who came from far off lands, were really wise men and that still today they represent the scientists and teachers who are able to see the secret meaning of life and the universe in this Child;

if you believe that this Child is simultaneously Man and God, that, being Man, He is your brother and, being God, a part of God exists in you, and therefore you are filled with joy and real pride;

if you believe all this, know that I am born again and Christmas has come anew among you. I will always be near, walking with you, weeping with you and playing with you, until the day when all — humankind and universe — reach the House of God, who is Father and Mother of infinite goodness, to live together forever and be eternally happy.

Bethlehem: December 25, Year 1,  
Signed: The Child Jesus

Leonardo Boff (Submitted by Gemma)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

January 2017						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 World Day of Prayer for Peace	2	3	4	5	6	7 The Finding in the Temple, celebrated before the Baptism of Jesus
8 Baptism of Jesus Holy Family Foundation Day Foundation of the Sisters of St Martha 1857	9	10	11	12 Affiliation with the Oblates 1858	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23 Feast of the Betrothal of Mary and Joseph	24	25	26	27	28
29	30 World Leprosy Day	31				