



Infant Jesus Sisters

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Dearest Sisters and Friends,

Now that the Year of Mercy has come to an end and the Holy Doors have been closed, we are encouraged by the Christmas story to keep our minds and hearts open to the gift of mercy that the Lord seeks to give us. Having received his mercy, we can then open our hearts to others.

With Pope Francis we have celebrated an intense Jubilee Year in which we have received the grace of mercy in abundance. *“Like a gusting but wholesome wind, the Lord’s goodness and mercy have been poured out upon the entire world. Because each of us has experienced at length this loving gaze of God, we cannot remain unaffected, for it changes our lives.”* (Misericordia et Misera 4 – Pope Francis’ letter at the end of the Year of Mercy).



The image on our Christmas card this year invites us to delight in God’s creation and the interconnectedness of all that exists. Mary introduces the infant Jesus to the wonders of the universe and creation itself. Jesus reaches out to embrace the whole of creation in both its wonder and its simplicity. The marguerite daisy, symbol of simplicity, is very familiar to us, members and friends of the Institute, and reminds us of the motto on the blazon, which is still used in many of our schools throughout the world, *“Simple in virtue, steadfast in duty.”*

Relationships, openness and dialogue are at the centre of Christmas and close to the heart of Pope Francis. *“Dialogue, dialogue, dialogue”*, he urges us. Dialogue is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say. However difficult things have become in the realm of human life and relationships, we believe that they can change. The Messiah, saviour of the people, has come. Through this child wisdom and understanding, guidance and courage, discernment and holiness, will spill out over all creation, leading to peace and reconciliation. Natural enemies will seek each other out to form a peaceful and rich companionship. All of creation, including not just humanity, but also the world of animals, insects and plants, will exist in harmonious fruitfulness.

A recent image on the news was of a family: man, woman and children, with their donkey and cart, making their way out of Syria – a reminder of Joseph leading the donkey with Mary and Jesus. In recent years the number of people on the move from war and want has increased dramatically.

They walk with very little sense of where they are going, unsure of the welcome they will receive. In many of our countries, especially in Europe, people arrive on our shores seeking a better life. Like all immigrants they are on a journey of hope. They challenge us as individuals and as a society to match the hope in their eyes, a hope similar to that in the eyes of Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus all those years ago. If we really want to be a welcoming community, we must always ask the question, *“Who is being excluded?”*

Christmas is the dawning of a new age, a new hope that began with a fragile and vulnerable infant born in a stable amidst poverty, death, and darkness. This child was determined to be born, this God was committed



to come among us, even and especially to the darkest, most crowded, miserable and unwanted places. This is where Jesus was born, small, vulnerable, but filled with life to light the world.

When have I seen new hope appear from a most unexpected place?



It is at the crib that we meet the tiny, fragile child, the Prince of Peace, who comes into a world that is torn apart by violence, fear and mutual suspicion. Let us come before the crib in our vulnerability, humanness and inner stillness. The outward silence of Christmas night invites us to make silence within us. It is only when we uncover the quiet space within our hearts that we will experience something of the tenderness of God. Let us go into the inner room of our hearts. We may feel drained and tired from the cares and worries in our lives, from the unending violence in our world or because of the seeming hopelessness of the situation of the thousands of migrants who continue on their journeys towards a better life. Yet we believe in God's love and tenderness and his promise to be with us always. Thus, in faith, we welcome this child, Emmanuel, God with us.

The invitation of Christmas is that the Lord, in coming to us, wants above all to draw us to himself. He loves each of us, our hidden selves, more than we can ever know. In his sight we are beautiful. We may not think so, but he sees us with clear eyes. He sees deep into the soul given to each one of us by his heavenly Father and which is beautiful beyond measure.

Do I see each person, including myself, as God does?

Christmas brings us all back to the crib of life to begin again, aware of what has gone before, conscious that nothing can last, but full of hope that this time we can learn what it takes to live well and grow towards fullness of life. As we gaze at the crib we see the embodiment of God's loving humility, coming to us in poverty so that we may not be overwhelmed by God's majesty but drawn to God's love.

There is a child in each of us waiting to be born again. It is to those looking for life that the Christ-child beckons. Christmas is not only for children. It is for those who refuse to give up and grow old, for those to whom life comes anew and with purpose each and every day, for those who can let go of yesterday so that today and tomorrow can always be full of new possibility. It is for those who live with joy and vitality whatever their age. Christmas is a never-ending feast, a celebration of change, a call to begin once more the journey to human joy and fulfilment.

What is the message of Christmas for me this year?

May the blessings of the Christmas season come to all of us and especially to those who have least among us. May the bells ring out and remind us, when we look at the crib, that Christ is born in everyone's heart, especially in those who feel excluded from society, the dispossessed and the lonely.

How can I reach out to those in need in my particular circumstances?

Let us open our hearts to Emmanuel, God with us, and respond to his invitation. Allow the life of our souls to breathe with a fresh grace that comes with forgiveness and repentance, a grace that enables us to go forward with new heart, new hope and new love.

Kimiko, Maria, Noreen and I send you every good wish for a happy and holy Christmas,

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