

Richard



Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

**PASTORAL MESSAGE
for the Feast of the Holy Family
27th December 2020**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This year of 2020 has been a challenging year for us all and I am very conscious of the many families across the Diocese who will have been affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic, perhaps through the loss of a loved one, sickness within the family, the challenges of work and school in these times and the economic hardship that has been the experience of many during these last months.

As we look to the New Year, with a good part of the Diocese now in Tier 4 measures – perhaps to be joined by other areas in the coming days – we know that many challenges lie ahead.

Our Christmas celebrations, both in church and at home, are quieter this year. However, it is never possible to “cancel Christmas,” for the reality of the Saviour’s Birth continues to bring light to our hearts, to our homes and to the whole world.

God’s promises always take us beyond ourselves; God’s promises are always fulfilled. We see this in the first reading of Today’s Mass, in which Abram – soon to be Abraham – and his wife Sarah become the parents of the Chosen People of Israel. In the Gospel, Simeon’s longed-for hope is fulfilled as the Holy Family stand before him and he lays eyes on the Saviour. In that one moment, his whole life finds its completion in Christ.

So it is with us. God’s promise for us is present in Jesus – a promise that is fulfilled in the light and life that He brings to us. Just as Jesus transformed the lives of Mary and Joseph, so the presence of Christ in our own families transforms our lives. If we are open to Him, our families will truly become holy families, our homes will be filled with His light - a light that will shine for the community around us. It is a light that is needed in our world. Society cries out for it – perhaps especially this year – and every family, every one of us, is called to share this light.

Mary and Joseph find themselves filled with wonder about all that Simeon says. May we all be open to the gift of wonder at the Saviour's Birth and in every moment of his life, death and resurrection. Our wonder at the birth of Jesus leads us to reflect on the wonder and mystery of life itself.

Pope Francis, reflecting on the Crib scene, writes:

“the birth of a child awakens joy and wonder; it sets before us the great mystery of life. Seeing the bright eyes of a young couple gazing at their newborn child, we understand the feelings of Mary and Joseph, as they looked at the Infant Jesus, sensed God's presence in their lives.”¹

This wonder at the gift of life is at the very heart of our understanding of the human person, the value of life from the moment of conception to natural death – for in life with see the presence of God.

As our families, our homes, reflect the light of Christ, the love that is present in the Holy Family, may we bring to our world a renewed appreciation of the gift of life that has been given to us – for in this life we find the wonder and mystery of God Himself.

May I take this opportunity to assure you and those of your families who are unable to be with you this year, as they will have hoped, of my prayers. May we all experience the light, love and life of this great Season of Christmas.

With every Blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Richard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

¹ POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Admirabile signum*, on the meaning and importance of the Nativity scene, n.8.