

## Christmas Message 2025

In these days leading up to Christmas, I'm pleased to have the chance to say hullo and offer my best wishes as we prepare for the feast. May you have the great blessing of peace as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Saviour.

In praying for the gift of peace, I recall the first message of Pope Leo when he came out onto the balcony of St Peter's basilica in May this year. It was his first appearance as Pope. He came to greet the thousands of people gathered in St Peter's Square and the millions watching on television. He stretched out his arms and said, "Peace be with you all."

He recalled that this greeting of peace was the first greeting of Jesus when he met his disciples after his resurrection. Pope Leo then said, "I, too, would like this greeting of peace to enter your hearts, to reach your families, and all people, wherever they are, all of the people, all over the earth. Peace be with you!"

Pope Leo began with a message of peace, and he has repeated that message many times since. He has prayed earnestly for peace, particularly in those places around the world that are suffering the devastation of war. He has called for an end to conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East and Africa. He has urged all parties to find a way to peace.

As we hear of conflicts in many parts of the world, we might also know of conflicts nearer to home. We might be aware of families where there's tension and even violence. We realise that there's a great need to build peace at the local level as well as peace between nations.

The feast of Christmas can give us fresh hope. In many ways, Christmas is a feast of peace. It's the feast of the birth of the Prince of Peace, one who came to lead us from darkness to light, from conflict to concord.

At Christmas, we read of an angel appearing to shepherds, announcing the birth of a Saviour. We read that a host of angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace." (Luke 2:8-14) This is a gift well worth praying for – the gift of peace – peace in our hearts, peace in our families, peace in our communities, peace in the world.

Jesus said to his first disciples, "Peace be with you." As we move towards Christmas, I pray the same for you. Peace be with you. We reflect in sorrow on the suffering in so many places. We pray that conflicts might be ended, and sorrow might turn to joy.

May this Christmas bring peace and joy to you and your family. May this Christmas bring peace and joy to our world. Merry Christmas, one and all. God bless us, everyone.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR