

## LIVING FRATERNITY

### Theme: The Love of God given in a child ... and what Child!

In this month of December 2024, we offer for your reflection Pope Francis' homely on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ, on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016, given at the Vatican Basilica.

*Good reflection and sharing.*

**Recall:** Our monthly meeting should favour an encounter with Christ. A spirit of prayer will ensure a meeting that will promote a good experience for all the members

## DECEMBER 2024 MONTHLY MEETING

### Opening of the meeting

Following the hymn, a prayer from the Ritual or another, chosen by the fraternity, starts the meeting.

### Introduction

Each year, in December, our thoughts are invaded by beautiful memories of the feast of Christmas experienced in family gatherings and specially in church.

“The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all” (Tit 2:11). The words of the Apostle Paul reveal the mystery of this holy night: the grace of God has appeared, his free gift. In the Child given to us, the love of God is made visible.

It is a *night of glory*, that glory proclaimed by the angels in Bethlehem and by our selves as well, all over the world. It is a *night of joy*, because henceforth and for ever, the infinite and eternal God is *God with us. He is not far off*. We need not search for him in the heavens or in mystical notions. He is close at hand. He became man and he will never withdraw from our humanity, which he has made his own. It is a *night of light*. The light prophesied by Isaiah (cf. 9:1), which was to shine on those who walked in a land of darkness, has appeared and enveloped the shepherds of Bethlehem (cf. Lk 2:9).

### Reflection and sharing:

Take time to share your thoughts on the content of the paragraph.

### Continue reading

The shepherds discover simply that “a child has been born to us” (Is 9:5). They realize that all this glory, all this joy, all this light, converges to a single point, the sign that the angel indicated to them:

“You will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger” (Lk 2:12). This is the enduring sign for all who would find Jesus. Not just then, but also today. If we want to celebrate Christmas authentically, we need to contemplate this sign: the frail simplicity of a tiny newborn child, the meekness with which he is placed in a manger, the tender affection with which he is wrapped in his swaddling clothes. That is where God is.

**Reflection and sharing:**

Share what touches mostly you in the preceding paragraph. Take time to allow for a good sharing.

**Continue reading.**

With this sign, the Gospel reveals a paradox. It speaks of the emperor, the governor, the high and mighty of those times, yet God does not make himself present there. He appears not in the splendour of a royal palace, but in the poverty of a stable; not in pomp and show, but in simplicity of life; not in power, but in astonishing smallness. In order to meet him, we need to go where he is. We need to bow down, to humble ourselves, to make ourselves small. The newborn Child challenges us. He calls us to leave behind fleeting illusions and to turn to what is essential, to renounce our insatiable cravings, to abandon our endless yearning for things we will never have. We do well to leave such things behind, in order to discover, in the simplicity of the divine Child, peace, joy and the luminous meaning of life.

**Reflection and sharing:**

In this paragraph, that we have just listen to, what do you retain about the comparison? Do you see any sentences that particularly retain your attention? Which ones? Share them.

**Continue reading.**

Let us allow the Child in the manger to challenge us, but let us also be challenged by all those children in today’s world who are lying not in a crib, caressed with affection by their mothers and fathers, but in squalid “mangers that devour dignity”. Children who hide underground to escape bombardment, on the pavements of large cities, in the hold of a boat overladen with immigrants... Let us allow ourselves to be challenged by those children who are not allowed to be born, by those who cry because no one relieves their hunger, by those who hold in their hands not toys, but weapons

**Reflection and sharing:**

Does the preceding paragraph new? It is one of Pope Francis’ homilies from 2016 ...  
Do you see something from our time? Name the events from our time that are found in this homily.

**Continue reading.**

The mystery of Christmas, which is light and joy, challenges and unsettles us, because it is at once a mystery of hope and of sadness. It has a taste of sadness, inasmuch as love is not accepted, and life discarded. Such was the case with Joseph and Mary, who met with closed doors, and placed Jesus in a manger, “because there was no place for them in the inn” (v. 7). Jesus was born rejected by some and regarded by many others with indifference. Today too, that same indifference can exist, whenever Christmas becomes a holiday with our selves at the centre rather than Jesus; when the lights of shop windows push the light of God into the shadows, when we are enthused about gifts but indifferent to our neighbours in need. This worldliness has kidnapped Christmas; we need to liberate it.

**Reflection and sharing:**

In the preceding paragraph, we read that « because Christmas has at once a mystery of hope ». Can you say that you would agree with these words? Why?

**Continue reading**

That night, the shepherds understood this. They were among the marginalized of those times. Yet no one is marginalized in the sight of God, and that Christmas, they themselves were the guests. People who felt sure of themselves, self-sufficient, were at home with their possessions. It was the shepherds who “set out with haste” (cf. Lk 2:16). Tonight, may we too be challenged and called by Jesus. Let us approach him with trust, starting from all those things that make us feel marginalized, from our limitations and our sins. Let us be touched by the tenderness that saves. Let us draw close to God who draws close to us. Let us pause to gaze upon the crib, and relive in our imagination the birth of Jesus: light and peace, dire poverty and rejection. With the shepherds, let us enter into the real Christmas, bringing to Jesus all that we are, our alienation, our unhealed wounds, our sins. Then, in Jesus, we will enjoy the taste of the true spirit of Christmas: the beauty of being loved by God. With Mary and Joseph, let us pause before the manger, before Jesus who is born as bread for my life. Contemplating his humble and infinite love, let us simply tell him: Thank you. Thank you because you have done all this for me.

**Biblical Reflection**

After the reading of the Gospel according to saint Luke, share your thoughts with the help of one or some of the following questions:

1. What does this gospel teach us?
2. To whom does it speak?
3. How does it reach us personally?
4. Is it a message of hope? Why and how is it?

## **Life Objective**

In this month of December, during our fraternal meetings, let's share the joys that we have had during this time of Advent and Christmas ...

**End of the meeting:** (song or prayer chosen by the fraternity)

## **At home**

**Read this following excerpt from 1 Celano 84 ... in front of a crèche prepared at home, at a parish church or elsewhere.**

Also, we must recall and honor with a reverent memory what he did, in the third year before the day of glorious death, in the fortified village that is called Greccio the day of the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. There was in this country a man named John, of good reputation, but of even better life. The blessed Francis cherished him in a particular way because, although in his country he was noble and honorable to the highest point, he had tread upon the nobility of the flesh to follow the nobility of the spirit.

The blessed Francis, as he often did, had him come to him about fifteen days before memory of this child who was born in Bethlehem and observe in detail, as much as the nativity of the Lord and said to him: « If you wish to celebrate the present birth of the Lord at Greccio, hurry and come in advance and do what I tell you, prepare it with care. Because I want to recall the possible through my mortal eyes, the annoyances in the needs of the child, as he lay in a crib and how, next to an ox and a donkey, he was laid on the hay. » Hearing this, the good and loyal man ran quickly and prepared in this place everything that the saint had said ...

At last the saint of God came and, finding everything prepared, he saw and was filled with joy. In fact, a crib was prepared, hay was brought, an ox and a donkey were brought in. There simplicity was honoured, poverty exalted, humility praised and this made of the village of Greccio to become a new Bethlehem.

**Accept our wishes for a Peaceful Christmas as well as a New Year filled with peace and joy for all our brothers and sisters.**