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# Praying before the Child with the Pope

Selections from Benedict XVI's Christmas homilies and addresses that can nourish our prayer at Christmas

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## Preparation

“Each one of the invocations that implores the coming of Wisdom, of the Sun of Justice, of God-with-us, contains a prayer addressed by the people to the One awaited so that he will hasten his coming. However,

invoking the gift of the birth of the promised Saviour also means committing ourselves to preparing his way, to having a worthy dwelling-place ready for him, not only in the area that surrounds us but especially within our souls” (19 December 2007).

“May Christmas be a feast of peace and joy for everyone: joy in the Birth of the Saviour, the Prince of Peace. Like the shepherds, let us hasten toward Bethlehem from this very moment. In the heart of the Holy Night, we too will be able to contemplate the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, together with Mary and Joseph (cf. Lk 2: 12, 16). Let us ask the Lord to open our hearts, so that we may enter into the mystery of his Birth. May Mary, who gave her virginal womb to the Word of God, whom as Mother she contemplated as a baby in her motherly arms and whom she

continues to offer to everyone as the Redeemer of the world, help us make this Christmas an opportunity for growth in the knowledge and love of Christ” (19 December 2007).

## **Faith**

“The world becomes ever more chaotic and even violent; we see it every day. And the light of God, the light of Truth, is extinguished. Life becomes dark and lacks a compass. How important it is that we really are believers and that as believers we strongly reaffirm, with our lives, the mystery of salvation that brings with it the celebration of Christ's Birth!” (19 December 2007).

“Men and women of today, humanity come of age yet often still so frail in mind and will, let the Child of Bethlehem take you by the hand! Do not fear; put your trust in him!” (25 December 2005).

## Hope

“The men and women in our technological age risk becoming victims of their own intellectual and technical achievements, ending up in spiritual barrenness and emptiness of heart. That is why it is so important for us to open our minds and hearts to the Birth of Christ, this event of salvation which can give new hope to the life of each human being.

“At Christmas we contemplate God made man, divine glory hidden beneath the poverty of a Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger; the Creator of the Universe reduced to the helplessness of an infant. Once we accept this paradox, we discover the Truth that sets us free and the Love that transforms our lives. On Bethlehem Night, the Redeemer becomes one of us, our companion along the

precarious paths of history. Let us take the hand which he stretches out to us: it is a hand which seeks to take nothing from us, but only to give” (25 December 2005).

## Love

“God is so great that he can become small. God is so powerful that he can make himself vulnerable and come to us as a defenceless child, so that we can love him. God is so good that he can give up his divine splendour and come down to a stable, so that we might find him, so that his goodness might touch us, give itself to us and continue to work through us. This is Christmas” (25 Decemer 2005).

*“You are my son, this day I have begotten you.* God has become one of us, so that we can be with him and become like him. As a sign, he chose the Child lying in the manger: this is how God is” (25 December 2005).

“Tomorrow night we will gather together to celebrate the great mystery of love which never ceases to amaze us: God became the Son of Man so that we might become children of God” (23 December 2007).

“In that Child lying in the stable, God has shown his glory – the glory of love, which gives itself away, stripping itself of all grandeur in order to guide us along the way of love. The light of Bethlehem has never been extinguished. In every age it has touched men and women, *it has shone around them*. Wherever people put their faith in that Child, charity also springs up – charity towards others, loving concern for the weak and the suffering, the grace of forgiveness” (25 December 2005).

## **Apostolate**

“If people do not recognize that God was made man, what is the point of celebrating Christmas? The

celebration becomes empty. We Christians must first reaffirm the truth about the Birth of Christ with deep and heartfelt conviction, in order to witness to all men and women the awareness of an unprecedented gift which is not only a treasure for us but for everyone. From this stems the duty of evangelization” (19 December 2007).

“Nothing is more beautiful, urgent and important than freely offering to men and women, in turn, what we ourselves have freely received from God! Nothing can dispense or relieve us from this burdensome but fascinating commitment. While the joy of Christmas that we already anticipate fills us with hope, it spurs us at the same time to proclaim to everyone God's presence in our midst” (23 December 2007).

“Only by rediscovering the gift she has received can the Church bear

witness to Christ the Saviour before all people. She does this with passionate enthusiasm, with full respect for all cultural and religious traditions; she does so joyfully, knowing that the One she proclaims *takes away nothing that is authentically human*, but instead brings it to fulfilment. In truth, Christ comes to destroy only evil, only sin; everything else, all the rest, he elevates and perfects” (25 December 2006).

“The true mystery of Christmas is the inner brightness radiating from this Child. May that inner brightness spread to us, and kindle in our hearts the flame of God’s goodness; may all of us, by our love, bring light to the world! Let us keep this light-giving flame, lit in faith, from being extinguished by the cold winds of our time! Let us guard it faithfully and give it to others!” (25 December 2007).

## **Conversion**

*“Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to those whom he loves – those who place their will in his, in this way becoming men of God, new men, a new world”* (25 December 2007).

“God loves everyone, because everyone is his creature. But some persons have closed their hearts; there is no door by which his love can enter. They think that they do not need God, nor do they want him. Other persons, who, from a moral standpoint, are perhaps no less wretched and sinful, at least experience a certain remorse. They are waiting for God. They realize that they need his goodness, even if they have no clear idea of what this means. Into their expectant hearts God’s light can enter, and with it, his peace” (25 December 2005).

## **Humility**

“In the stable at Bethlehem, heaven and earth meet. Heaven has come down to earth. For this reason, a light shines from the stable for all times; for this reason joy is enkindled there; for this reason song is born there....Heaven does not belong to the geography of space, but to the geography of the heart. And the heart of God, during the Holy Night, stooped down to the stable: the humility of God is heaven. And if we approach this humility, then we touch heaven. Then the earth too is made new. With the humility of the shepherds, let us set out, during this Holy Night, towards the Child in the stable! Let us touch God’s humility, God’s heart! Then his joy will touch us and will make the world more radiant” (25 December 2007).

“This is Christmas – the historical event and the mystery of love, which for more than two thousand years

has spoken to men and women of every era and every place. It is the holy day on which the ‘great light’ of Christ shines forth, bearing peace! Certainly, if we are to recognize it, if we are to receive it, faith is needed and humility is needed. The humility of Mary, who believed in the word of the Lord and, bending low over the manger, was the first to adore the fruit of her womb; the humility of Joseph, the just man, who had the courage of faith and preferred to obey God rather than to protect his own reputation; the humility of the shepherds, the poor and anonymous shepherds, who received the proclamation of the heavenly messenger and hastened towards the stable, where they found the newborn child and worshipped him, full of astonishment, praising God” (25 December 2007).

## **Happiness**

“But does a ‘Saviour’ still have any value and meaning *for the men and women of the third millennium*? How can we not hear, from the very depths of this humanity, at once joyful and anguished, a heart-rending cry for help?... It is there, in the very depths of his being, in what the Bible calls his ‘heart,’ that man always needs to be saved. And, in this post-modern age, perhaps he needs a Saviour all the more, since the society in which he lives has become more complex and the threats to his personal and moral integrity have become more insidious. Who can defend him, if not the One who loves him to the point of sacrificing on the Cross his only-begotten Son as the Saviour of the world?” (25 December 2006).

*“Wake up, O man! For your sake God became man”* (Saint Augustine, *Sermo*, 185). Wake up, O men and women of the third millennium! At

Christmas, the Almighty becomes a child and asks for our help and protection. His way of showing that he is God challenges our way of being human. By knocking at our door, he challenges us and our freedom; he calls us to examine how we understand and live our lives” (25 December 2005).

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