

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Darkness and light are the primal symbols of the Advent and Christmas seasons, part of the rhythm of the earth, with fading light as we approach the winter solstice on the twenty-first of December, the day of shortest light and longest night, signalling that we can once again welcome the return of the light.

Christians have always looked to the rhythm of light overcoming darkness in the depths of winter and see it as symbolic of God's redeeming, self-emptying love, and of light breaking into the darkness of sin and death in the birth of Jesus, who is the light of the world. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. (John 8:12)

We are a people longing for a word of hope, a promise of light, at this moment in history marked by an environmental crisis, economic and social imbalances, and wars.

The people of Israel in Isaiah's day, who longed to return from the darkness of exile in Babylon, heard these words: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shone" (Isaiah 9:2). This message of hope and light has come to fulfillment in the birth of the Messiah, and it resonates today for us who hope for God's peace, consolation, and love in the midst of troubling times

The Christmas gospels proclaim the scandal of the Word of God made flesh, who "pitched his tent among us...full of grace and truth" (John 1:14); the dawning of God's promised salvation and the coming of God's kingdom of forgiveness, compassion, justice, and inclusion for all

Solidarity, not sentimentality, is the call of Christ to us at Christmas. In the midst of the multiple crises facing humanity and our planet at this time, it is all the more important for us to acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters, particularly those who are the most fragile: the sick, those who find themselves without shelter or work, or those suffering from racial discrimination, marginalization, or domestic violence

Let all of us renew our baptismal ministry to be visible signs of hope and solidarity and to serve as the hands of Christ in this Advent and Christmas season and throughout the year. May you, your family, and friends be blessed during this sacred time when we celebrate the Incarnation of God in human form

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