



December 25, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How many times have we gathered around the manger at Christmas to contemplate Christ's birth in Bethlehem? Year after year we associate Christmas with the Nativity scene: the angels, the shepherds, the Wise Men, Joseph, Mary and the Infant Jesus. We must not think, however, of the Birth of Christ as merely a singular historical event. On the first Christmas, the Son of God was born in Bethlehem, but today, this Christmas, He desires to be born in our hearts.

As Christ was given a home in Bethlehem, so too must we make a home for our Savior within ourselves, allowing Him to enter our hearts with His gift of hope. Recall the theme of the Holy Father's visit to the United States earlier this year, "Christ, Our Hope." Yes, brothers and sisters, the Christ Child that comes to us today is truly the genesis of our enduring hope.

During this past year, we have experienced considerable stress. Acts of terrorism and natural disasters, a divisive and long presidential election, and economic difficulties and worries may have contributed to a sense of hopelessness and disunity. But we must not despair! For our true hope is in the Lord, as we celebrate His birth in Bethlehem and ever more joyfully await and welcome His coming as Our Savior each day.

My Christmas prayer for you in this Pauline Year echoes that of the Apostle: that "Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19). This year, let us each welcome the Lord Jesus into our hearts, so that we may reflect His hope which He makes present within us and bring that hope to all those with whom we live, work and interact.

I bring each of you to the Christ Child in the manger in my daily prayers and Holy Masses during the Christmas season and throughout the New Year. One with you in the hope which Christ Jesus is, I remain,

Faithfully in Christ,

+ Paul S. Loverde

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde
Bishop of Arlington