



Infant Jesus Sisters

22 Hex ham Close, Worth, Crawley
RH10 7TZ West Sussex UK

E-mail: adminijs@btinternet.com

Website: www.infantjesussisters.org

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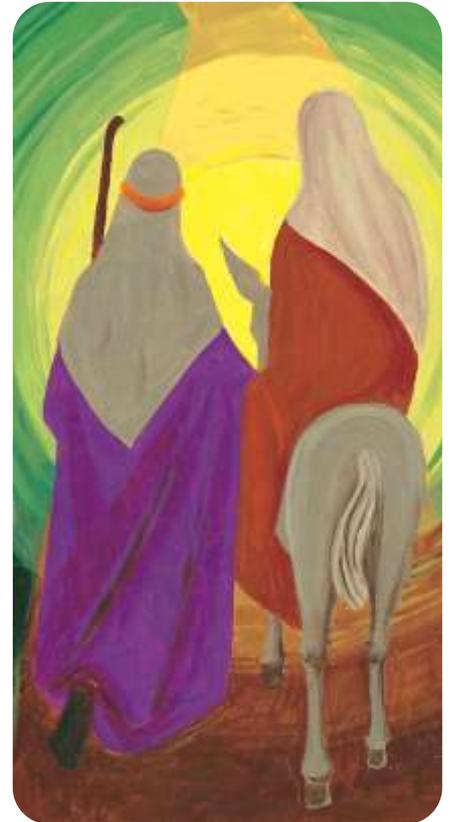
Dearest Sisters and Friends,

The Christmas season is with us once again and I wish you an abundance of joy as we celebrate this special feast. Christmas is one of the times when we are especially united throughout the Institute as we pray for and send greetings to one another. May your celebration of Emmanuel, God-with-us, bring you great joy – *“a joy to be shared by the whole people”* (Lk 2:10), including each one of you and your loved ones.

On Christmas night the Light comes to shatter the darkness. Darkness and despair are dispelled and the dawn heralds new life and freedom for all people. Joy is released upon the earth and it is time to share in the goodness of God. A child is born, an unknown and unnoticed child, a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. This child is the Messiah, the Saviour, the glory of God, breathing and sleeping among us.

On this night God chose to be born among us, who believe in the Word that has been given to us. On this Christmas night may God find us awake, with our hearts open, so that the space inside us might become a haven of peace for all those who touch our lives: those whose faces we see each day, those who reach out to us and those whom we often take for granted.

Our Christmas card this year shows Joseph and Mary, with her unborn child, on their journey to Bethlehem. The glory of the yet unborn Lord is shining around Mary and Joseph, a light still hidden from the people. *“Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to David’s town called Bethlehem, in order to be registered, together with Mary his betrothed, who was with child.”* (Lk 2:4-5).



The journey to Bethlehem was not an easy one for Joseph and Mary. It was not the way Mary imagined life would be in the days before the birth of her child. They were forced to leave their home in Nazareth just when she was about to have her baby. After the long journey to Bethlehem, there was no lodging awaiting them and they had to take shelter in a stable.

The seasons of Advent and Christmas bring a beautiful reminder of how we might find hope in the darkness, in times of confusion. It is helpful to be able to turn to Mary during this time, knowing that she was also afraid and confused at times, but she willingly walked the unknown path ahead of her. She, together with Joseph, persevered even in the darkest moments. *“When we are able to take the next step, with the trust that we will have enough light for the step that follows, we can walk through life and be surprised at how far we go”.* (Henri Nouwen)

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The Christmas story is full of challenges, not least of which is the unexpected and startling way that God chose to be born among us. It is both breathtaking and simple. It makes us wonder. *"A saviour has been born to us, he is Christ the Lord"* (Lk. 2). This child belongs to God and to all people.

"As for Mary", the Gospel says, *"she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart."* She thought about them; she prayed about them; she pondered. She is our model of a prayerful, listening, discerning person. Perhaps she was fearful, but she remained open to the unfolding mystery, trying to understand its meaning and to continue to respond to what God was asking of her.

We know very little about Joseph, except that he too was a very good listener. He listened to the angel who appeared to him in a dream and told him that the child in Mary's womb was conceived through the Holy Spirit. Although this was completely outside Joseph's experience he listened deeply and did as the angel asked; *"he took his wife to his home"* (Matt.1:24). He reorganised his whole life around his new, unexpected family. He also listened to the angels in Bethlehem; *"Do not be afraid. Listen! I bring news of great joy"*. (Lk. 2:10)

We, too, are invited to listen deeply, especially during this Christmas when we are in the midst of preparing for the General Chapter, the theme of which is **"Listen! I am sending you on a new path"**. This journey will be taken together with all our sisters and friends throughout the world. It is a journey, like that of Mary and Joseph and the Infant Jesus, which is unfolding step by step. Let us *Listen!*, and listen attentively to the Lord through one another, as we are led towards a new path, a new horizon. Let us listen ever more deeply and with our hearts. Let us listen to the Lord, who is gradually revealing which path to take.

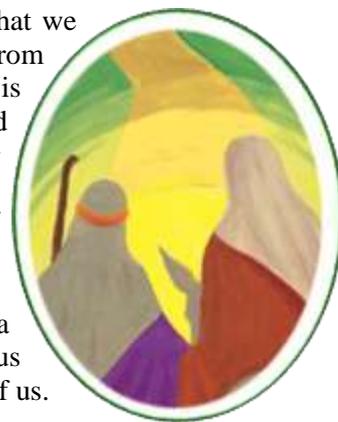
"Look, I am doing something new, now it emerges: can you not see it?" (Isaiah 43:19)

Towards what new horizon are we being led? Pope Francis tells us, *"For the great human family, it is necessary to renew always the common horizon toward which we are journeying. The horizon of hope! This is the horizon that makes a good journey."*

Christmas has meaning for us only when we are personally touched by it and welcome the birth of Christ in our hearts. Christmas invites us to reflect on who Christ is for each one of us, what he means for us and for our lives. What is the "added value" that Christ gives to our lives? Is our life with Christ different from the life of a person who does not believe in Christ, whose life is not touched and shaped by his presence?

On Christmas Day, more than any other day in the year, it is good to remember that we have no other authentic light but Christ. He is born for us today. He came down from Heaven to light an eternal flame within us. We cannot keep the light for ourselves; it is meant for all peoples. May we draw on our creativity to unite with all people of good will, whatever their faith or origin, so that the light of Christ may be revealed in our world. May this light so invade our darkness that abundant joy may spread throughout the earth! At Christmas, *"amid so much darkness, let us see the light of hope and be men and women who bring hope to others."* (Pope Francis)

At the centre of all our Christmas celebrations is the newborn Christ child lying in a manger – and the love and salvation that he brings to the world. Christmas reminds us that God has come close to us, that he desires to walk the path of life with each one of us. Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God-with-us.



Kimiko, Maria and Noreen join me in wishing you all a very happy, hopeful and joyful Christmas,

Maria