

CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

May God bless you, your family, and every family in Barbados during this joyous season of Christmas. May you experience the gift that God showers on you through your family. It is His most precious gift to you.

God's love is expressed not primarily in words, but through the gift of Jesus Christ who came as a vulnerable baby born in Bethlehem. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." John 1: 14. This gift is our salvation, for He came: "That every one who believes may have eternal life in Him" Jn 3:16.

God's creation and redemption of us humans comes in and through a family. God is family--a trinity of persons. Jesus Christ was born to a family--the Holy Family, Joseph, Mary and Jesus. It is through the family that God transforms and saves the world.

I invite you to see Christmas as a gift of loving mercy from God in and through our families. God gives himself as love to Mary and Joseph and through them to all the world. The word of God says "God is love and anyone who lives in love lives in God." We are invited to encounter the gift of love this Christmas Season, not in the abstract, but in and through our families.

The Christmas manger that we contemplate each year points us to this miracle of love. Salvation or development cannot come to the nation as a whole, unless it first comes through the family. It is in that light that in my message for our 49th year of Independence I stressed the need for us to see the family as prior to the state in existence and in rights. I did this by challenging us to revisit our understanding of the word economy. "In its original understanding economy was about managing the affairs of the family. Its focus was on ensuring the development of families - the nation being a family of families."

Yes, Christmas is about the loving mercy of God revealed in the family. It is in the family that God wants us to experience and enjoy true development. For this to happen we need, as a people, to make hard decisions about:

- Putting the family first over and above the state.
- Focussing on a model of the economy that puts the development of the household first, as opposed to the mindless accumulation of wealth.
- Choosing character and values first as opposed to satisfying our selfish wants and desires.

To receive the Gift of Christ this Christmas we need also to receive in our hearts His plan of salvation. This plan is centred in the family. So this Christmas give your family a gift: a gift of forgiveness and reconciliation, a gift of time and commitment, a gift of love and mercy. If you put your family first, it will be the best gift you could give to them and to Barbados.

A great place to begin is with forgiveness. Let us ask for God's grace to remove all that stifles and chokes us and allow the love of the Christ Child to flow freely. For Catholics this is a jubilee year of mercy given to us by Pope Francis. I urge you to love and forgive in your own family, and as a family reach out to other families that may be in material or spiritual need.

Please have a Family Christmas this year as you experience the loving mercy of the heart of our God. A BLESSED AND PEACEFUL CHRISTMAS TO YOU AND YOUR LOVED ONES

+Charles Jason Gordon
Bishop Of Bridgetown