



**CHRISTMAS MESSAGE: "PILGRIMS OF HOPE"**

**"I bring you good news of great joy...Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, we are invited once again to become "Pilgrims of Hope". To celebrate Christmas as pilgrims of hope is to welcome anew the mystery that, "from the infinite horizon of his love, God wished to enter into the limits of human history and the human condition. He took on a body and a heart" (Benedict XVI, Angelus, 1 June, 2008) So that, in this ultimate miracle of the Incarnation, "we can contemplate and encounter the infinite in the finite, the invisible and ineffable Mystery in the human Heart of Jesus, the Nazarene" (Ibid.). This profound mystery reveals a God who chooses to walk with us, sharing our joys and struggles.

The birth of Jesus is the foundation of our eternal hope. God did not remain distant from human pain; He chose to dwell among us (cf. Jn 1:14), taking on our vulnerability and experiencing our suffering (cf. Heb 4:15). In the manger at Bethlehem, we see the astonishing truth that God's answer to a broken world is not domination but incarnation and the self-giving love (Romans 5:8) that enters our frailty to redeem us from within. He enters our world quietly, gently, and tenderly: into poverty, uncertainty, and the shadow of earthly powers. In this humble birth, God identifies deeply with those who today face conflict, displacement, and loss. The Holy Family themselves knew what it meant to be uprooted: fleeing to Egypt, they became refugees, strangers in a foreign land (cf. Matt 2:13). Their story is echoed in the lives of millions around the world who long for safety, dignity, and peace.

Hope, for Christians, is rooted in God Himself, who entered our history not with power or privilege, but in the vulnerable form of a child. The Saviour, born in Bethlehem is our hope, not because He removes every burden at once, but because He reveals that even in the darkest places, God is near (Psalm 145:18). Strengthened by this nearness, we continue our pilgrim journey, carrying hope into the world and to all humanity. St. Paul reminds us that "in hope we were saved" (Romans 8:24) and that this "hope does not disappoint" (Romans 5:5), because God's love has already been poured into our hearts. It allows us to live joyfully, even in hardship, because our joy rests on the unchanging faithfulness of God.

Christian hope, therefore, is a way of living now, a path we walk even while tears are still wet on our faces. Hope takes root precisely where the world tells us it should not; in prisons, in refugee camps, in cities under bombardment, and in villages emptied by violence. Through Christ, we discover that we are never abandoned. We carry within us a promise: God will bring life out of death, peace out of turmoil, and healing out of wounds still open.

Christmas, thus proclaims that God's love is stronger than fear and suffering, and that He walks with us through every valley.

The Christmas story also teaches us that joy and peace do not depend on favourable circumstances. The shepherds, who lived hard and uncertain lives, were the first to receive the message of "great joy for all people" (Lk 2:10). This joy was not the denial of hardship, but the assurance that God's love had entered their world. For those living through war today, for families separated, for communities shattered, for people who have lost homes, livelihoods, and loved ones, Christmas speaks a quiet, but powerful truth: the light still shines, and the darkness cannot overcome it (Jn 1:15). Jesus is the Light in the darkness, the One who brings peace no matter how deep the night may feel.

The Christmas story further calls us to see one another as brothers and sisters, each carrying the image of God. For this reason, it calls leaders and nations to choose dialogue over destruction, mercy over vengeance, and human life over political gain. It invites all of us, wherever we are to become instruments of peace in our families, our communities, and our world. As disciples of the "Prince of Peace" (Is 9:6), we must continue to pray, speak, and work for peace; seeking dialogue where there is hostility, reconciliation where there is injury, and justice where there is oppression. This is part of our Christmas mission.

As pilgrims of hope, let us walk together into the year ahead, carrying the light of Christ for one another. May we feel the nearness of the God who promises never to abandon us. And may the Child of Bethlehem, born in simplicity yet radiant with divine love, bless our world with healing and lasting peace.

Imphal, 8<sup>th</sup> Dec., 2025, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary



**Happy Christmas!  
May hope be your companion, today and always!**

Yours in Goodwill and Peace,

  
+ Dr. Linus Neli, JCD  
Archbishop of Imphal

