



File photo
Pope John Paul II, with crozier in hand, celebrated midnight Mass on Christmas Eve inside St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in 1989.

Christmas provides sign of God's love, pope says

Prays that children feel closer to Jesus

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Christmas is a sign that God continues to love and care for the world, Pope John Paul II said.

The pope marked the third Sunday of Advent Dec. 13 with a parish Mass, an Angelus address and a blessing of Nativity scene figures in St. Peter's Square.

"Jesus appeared to the world as a little baby; through the poverty, simplicity and humility of his birth, he wanted to lead all of us to understand his mysterious design for salvation," the pope said during the morning Mass at Rome's St. Hugo Parish.

Jesus' birth marked the beginning of salvation offered to every person without distinction or restriction, he said.

After giving his own life to redeem humanity, the risen Jesus founded the church and entrusted it with the mission of safeguarding and spreading "the eternal truth" of God's plan for salvation.

"Since then, the people of God, rich in charisms and ministries placed at the service of the one faith and one Lord, have spread to every land in many particular communities, dioceses and parishes in order to proclaim and witness to this message of salvation of which it is the depository," the pope said.

During his noon Angelus address, the pope said the new Catechism of the Catholic Church is an example of the church's faithful response to its

mission.

"The promulgation of the new catechism is not only an act of doctrinal regulation, but it takes on the fervor of an appeal to all believers to make a more intense commitment to the new evangelization," he said.

As the 20th century ends, he said, the world "will continue to be the object of the love and providence of God."

"More than ever it will need love, hope, peace, solidarity among peoples and true justice for the oppressed in the context of a rediscovered balance for humanity with nature and the cosmos."

The "perennial longing of the human heart" finds its satisfaction in the redeeming action of the incarnated God whose birth is celebrated at Christmas, he said.

At the end of the Angelus, the pope turned his attention to thousands of children from primary schools in and around Rome.

"In a little while I will bless, like I do every year, the little statues of Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the other characters which you place in the manger with so much love and devotion to commemorate the greatest event of human history: the birth of the divine Redeemer."

The pope told the children that with their parents and families they can relive the wonder that took place in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago.

"Gathered around the manger, you can adore the baby Jesus, welcome his word of truth and salvation and offer him your intentions of hard work and goodness," he said.

The pope prayed that the children would feel closer to Jesus "and be moved to be more gentle and generous toward your neighbor, especially toward the poor and suffering."

Holy Father blesses Nativity scene destined for Bosnia-Herzegovina

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope John Paul II blessed a traveling Nativity scene headed for Bosnia-Herzegovina and said he hoped it would brighten Christmas for the tens of thousands of war victims there.

The Nativity scene, mounted on a semi-trailer truck, was put together by Franciscan religious orders in Europe. The group hoped to make it to the devastated Bosnian capital of Sarajevo during a tour of the former Yugoslavian republics Dec. 23-Jan. 2.

The truck was to be followed by other vehicles carrying humanitarian aid, picked up along the way.

The pope, meeting with organizers at the start of a general audience at the Vatican Dec. 16, called the initiative a

"caravan of hope" and said it offered "concrete support for the victims of this grave and ongoing conflict."

He praised the project for seeking to involve people along its European itinerary in an action of great humanitarian value.


"Convey my best wishes to those you meet, to those who offer you support and to those who, thanks to your generosity, will be able to enjoy a more serene Christmas," he said.

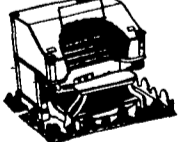
The pope has repeatedly issued pleas for peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and his top diplomatic representatives have urged more forceful international action to guarantee humanitarian relief to the thousands of people wounded or left homeless by the fighting.


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