



**CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2019**  
**The Most Reverend Richard Gagnon**  
**Archbishop of Winnipeg**  
**President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**

Dear Friends,

Reconciliation is a much used word in our present-day culture, but we seldom ponder in our hearts what a treasure and mystery reconciliation really is. In the Christmas season, its meaning and implications are vividly concrete as the birth of Christ brings a new light and a saving grace to our capacity to be reconciled and be reconcilers in our daily life.

In this liturgical season, we enter the Gospel scenes with new insights as we see and hear the angel choirs in the heavens and witness the shepherds experiencing a life-changing moment; in contrast, the inn does not have room for Mary and Joseph. The shepherds hasten to the manger to see what they are told, amaze others when telling them what they see, and when returning home, glorify and praise God for what they saw and heard. On the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God, we are told that, in a most unique and life-giving way, Mary treasured the words said of her Child and ponders them in her heart.

The star gives encouragement and direction to the wise men from the East; their search results in their being overwhelmed with joy and faith. Herod and his courtiers see no star of hope but in their self-imposed darkness plot death and misery. Such are the contrasts which continue throughout the celebrations of Christmas week

These mysteries of the life of Jesus, mysteries of our faith and indeed of the life of every believer, take on a beautiful significance when read in light of reconciliation. Reconciliation means embracing another, the coming together of those estranged. It begins by seeing and hearing anew, undergoing a profound change, turning from past ways and turning to the lord and to others in new ways. Christmas is the powerful sign and grace-filled opportunity of reconciliation: between heaven and earth; among family members, friends and colleagues; not only in our homes and churches but throughout our communities and world. The story of salvation is how God can change the human heart, how the Lord came down from heaven to reconcile the world to himself. The Prologue to the Gospel of John reminds us reconciliation is God's initiative and is life-giving:

in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (Jn 1: 4-5)

Reconciliation is both interior and exterior, personal and social - changing one's own heart and reaching out to others. The community of faith, to be a community of reconciliation, must provide encouragement for both internal reflection and external action. In order to take things to heart like Mary, who is the mother and model of the Church, the community needs to be an authentic witness to reconciliation. It must connect and be concerned with the lives and experiences of people. Saint Paul reminds the Church and its members that theirs is the ministry of reconciliation. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:18,19, "*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*" Reconciliation, as an essential dimension to human dignity and human relationships, means reaching out to all who are in situations of division, exploitation, marginalization and rejection. For Canadians in the present day, the ministry and message of reconciliation in a specific way impacts on Indigenous realities, on questions relating to earth as our common home, and on the indignities done to human life and the human person.

Jesus was placed in a manger at birth, a sign of how throughout his mission and ministry the world did not know him, his own people did not accept him, and he had no place to lay his head. In the midst of all the division, exploitation, marginalization and rejection, the Word became flesh and lived among us. It is the lesson of Christmas. Jesus' birth brought great joy to the entire world. We all share in the excitement of knowing about this great event of reconciliation.

***Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your loved ones.***

9 December 2019