

## CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2023 +Mark Hagemoen

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 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. (John 1: 1-5)*



Brothers and Sisters in Christ – This New Testament passage from St. John continues to inspire and encourage me. It is the introduction of the Gospel of St. John, which is proclaimed on Christmas Day.



During these darker of colder days, in the midst of a world wracked with violence and strife, our hearts are again stirred by the meaning and metaphors of *darkness* and *light*. It is so good to appreciate that *the light* infuses all darkness, and that *darkness* can never overcome *light*. A similar message comes to us from the prophet Isaiah, who proclaims: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of great darkness – on them, light has shined.” (Isaiah 9:2)

In this time of war and conflict in so many places in our world – and in the face of the great daily challenges facing so many vulnerable people affected by confusion and hopelessness, and also poverty, homelessness, illness, and other ‘losses’ – we long more than ever for *great light*. Our hearts yearn for the fulfillment of the angel’s proclamation at the birth of our Saviour, the

Light of the World, Jesus Christ: “Peace on earth, goodwill to those upon whom His favour rests.” (Luke 2:14)

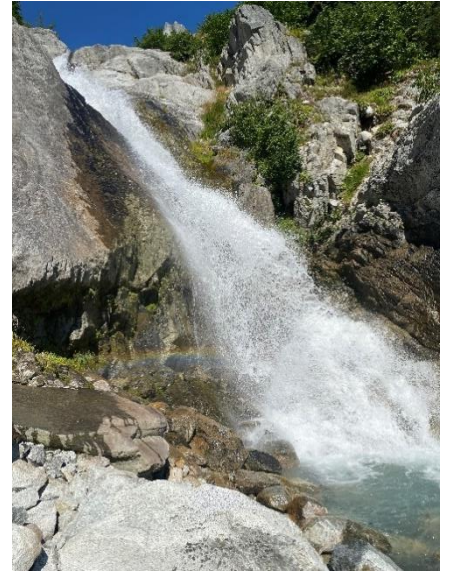


Jesus is the great light and hope that has come into the world. This is the reality that we celebrate joyfully at Christmas. It is the great *good news* that GOD IS WITH US. Emmanuel has indeed come! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is loving us, suffering with us, caring for us, holding us.

I invite you all to take time during this season of preparation and of celebration to renew your awareness that nothing can come between us and the great love of God in Jesus Christ. He brings a new way of peace and healing that fills us with the great rejoicing, that bursts forth in our songs and carols, that is reflected in our lights, decorations and gifts to others: *Joy to the World!* This awareness also means that we can live and act with a

renewed and bold **hope**. As Pope Benedict XVI states:

*“The Christian message is not only ‘informative’ but ‘performative.’ That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is **one that makes things happen and is life-changing**. The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life.” (See Spe Salve, #2)*





These reflections about *hope* are a reminder that you and I are called to the *hope* that finds its source in the Saviour who comes to us at Christmas. The Incarnation – Jesus who is the Word of God made flesh among us – is the inspiration and source of all hope. This awareness has been the inspiration for many who have gone before us. For example, I cite Saint John Henry Newman, who reminds us that,

*“The truth has been upheld in the world not as a system, not by books, not by argument, nor by temporal power, but by the personal influence of such men & women as have already been described, who are at once teachers and patterns of it...”*



May we be teachers and patterns of *hope* as we are renewed by the celebration of the Christmas season. Let us ask ourselves:

- i) How is God calling me to be *more fully human, fully alive* in my life right now?
- ii) Do I give the Christ permission to take my *heart of stone* and make it a *heart of flesh* – one that receives and expresses *HOPE*?



- iii) In what way is *this Christmas* different for me, in terms of what God wants me to change, to heal and forgive, to live and do differently?

I take this opportunity to thank you all for your love and faithfulness to God and His people, and his salvific desire for all the world. I also thank you for all that you each do every day to respond to the needs of those you care for, with compassion and care.

I wish you, your families, and communities, a blessed and joy-filled Christmas season!



Sincerely in Christ,

+ *Mark A. Hagemoen*

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