



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 21 December

2016 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Christian hope - 3. Christ's birth is the source of hope

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

We have recently begun a catechetical journey on the theme of hope, which is so very appropriate in the Season of Advent. The Prophet Isaiah has guided us up to this point. Today, just days before Christmas, I would like to reflect more specifically on the moment in which, so to speak, *hope came into the world*, with the incarnation of the Son of God. It was also Isaiah who foretold the birth of the Messiah in several passages: “Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (7:14); and also: “there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots” (11:1). In these passages, the meaning of Christmas shines through: God fulfills the promise by becoming man; not abandoning his people, he draws near to the point of stripping himself of his divinity. In this way God shows his fidelity and inaugurates a new Kingdom, which gives *a new hope to mankind*. And what is this hope? Eternal life.

When we speak of hope, often it refers to what is not in man's power to realize, which is invisible. In fact, what we hope for goes beyond our strength and our perception. But the Birth of Christ, inaugurating redemption, speaks to us of a different hope, a dependable, visible and understandable hope, because it is founded in God. He comes into the world and gives us the strength to walk with him: God walks with us in Jesus, and walking with him toward the fullness of life gives us the strength to dwell in the present in a new way, albeit arduous. Thus for a Christian, to hope means the certainty of being on a journey with Christ toward the Father who awaits us. Hope is never still; hope is always journeying, and it makes us journey. This hope, which the Child of Bethlehem gives us, offers a destination, a sure, ongoing goal, salvation of mankind, blessedness to those who trust in a merciful God. Saint Paul summarizes all this with the expression: “in this hope we were saved” (Rom 8:24). In other words, walking in this world, with hope, we are saved. Here we can ask ourselves the question, each one of us: am I walking with hope or is my interior life static, closed? Is my heart a locked drawer or a drawer open to the hope which enables me to walk — not alone — with Jesus?

In Christian homes, during the Season of Advent, *the Nativity scene* is arranged, according to the tradition which dates back to Saint Francis of Assisi. In its simple way, the Nativity scene conveys hope; each one of the characters is immersed in this atmosphere of hope.

First of all we note the place in which Jesus was born: *Bethlehem*. A small village in Judea where, thousands of years earlier, David was born, the shepherd boy chosen by God to be the King of Israel. Bethlehem is not a capital city, and for this reason is preferred by divine Providence, who loves to act through the little ones and the humble. In that birthplace was born the highly anticipated “Son of David”, Jesus, in whom the hope of God and the hope of man meet.

Then we look to *Mary*, Mother of hope. With her ‘yes’ she opened the door of our world to God: her maiden’s heart was full of hope, wholly enlivened by faith; and thus God chose her and she believed in his word. She, who for nine months was the Ark of the new and eternal Covenant, in the grotto, contemplates the Child and sees in him the love of God, who comes to save his people and the whole of humanity.

Next to Mary is *Joseph*, a descendant of Jesse and of David; he too believed in the words of the angel, and looking at Jesus in the manger, reflects on the fact that that Child has come from the Holy Spirit, and that God himself commanded him to call [the Child] ‘Jesus’. In that name there is hope for every man and woman, because through that son of woman, God will save mankind from death and from sin. This is why it is important to contemplate the Nativity scene!

In the Nativity scene there are also *shepherds*, who represent the humble and poor who await the Messiah, the “consolation of Israel” (Lk 2:25), and the “redemption of Jerusalem” (2:38). In this Child they see the realization of the promises and hope that the salvation of God will finally arrive for each of them. Those who trust in their own certainties, especially material, do not await God’s salvation. Let us keep this in mind: our own assurance will not save us; the only certainty that will save us is that of hope in God. It will save us because it is strong and enables us to journey in life with joy, with the will to do good, with the will to attain eternal happiness. The little ones, the shepherds, instead trust in God, hope in him and rejoice when they recognize in that Child the sign indicated by the angels (cf. Lk 2:12).

The very *choir of angels* proclaims from on high the great design that the Child fulfills: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased” (2:14). Christian hope is expressed in praise and gratitude to God, who has initiated his Kingdom of love, justice and peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, in these days, contemplating the Nativity scene, we prepare ourselves for the Birth of the Lord. It will truly be a celebration if we welcome Jesus, the seed of hope that God sets down in the furrows of our individual and community history. Every ‘yes’ to Jesus who comes, is a bud of hope. Let us trust in this bud of hope, in this ‘yes’: “Yes, Jesus, you can save

me, you can save me". Happy Christmas of hope to all!

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly those from Australia, Japan and the United States of America. I pray that each of you, and your families, may experience a blessed Advent, in preparation for the coming of the newborn Saviour at Christmas. God bless you!

I greet the Scouts who have brought the flame from the Crib of the Nativity in Bethlehem. I invite everyone to pray and to commit themselves to works of mercy so that Christmas may be a personal encounter with the Lord and give rise in us to good intentions to foster solidarity.

Lastly I address a special greeting to *young people*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. Dear *young people*, prepare yourselves for the mystery of the Incarnation with the faithful obedience and humility that Mary had. You, dear *sick people*, draw from her that strength and ardour for Jesus who comes among us. And you, dear *newlyweds*, contemplate the example of the Holy Family of Nazareth, in order to practice the same virtues on your journey of family life.