



4th Sunday of Advent and Christmas Day 2024

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Joy to the world the Lord is come”

Recently I heard the Christmas Hymn ‘Joy to the World’ sung by Phil Wickham, the American Christian songwriter. The opening verse goes like this:

Joy to the world the Lord is come
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing

The chorus after each verse:

We will sing, sing, sing, sing
Joy to the world
We will sing, sing, sing

The song is full of joy and captures the happiness of the coming child Jesus so well. That happiness at the coming of the Saviour is summed up in the Gospel passage for the 4th and last Sunday of Advent, where Mary visits Elizabeth who was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaims: *“When the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb, leaped for joy.”* If we were to continue the reading from St Luke where this is recorded we would hear Mary respond to Elizabeth’s greeting with her song of praise, the Magnificat. Both women recall and echo God’s history of showing favour to the people of Israel.

This Christmas we begin in the Church a special year, a Jubilee Year, that is only celebrated every 25 years. While the media will focus as usual on Rome and the Pope’s Blessing on Christmas Day, you can be sure the opening of the Holy Door to begin Jubilee Year will be highlighted. The Jubilee has been an event of the people since the first one in 1300; it was born of a request from the people of Rome to Pope Boniface VIII *“for a pardon of sins which would be not only abundant, but complete”* as it states in the Bull of Indiction.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



Among the ancient Hebrews, the Jubilee (called the Year of the Yobel, of “the goat” because the holiday was announced by the sound of a goat’s horn) was a year proclaimed as Holy. The Jubilee consists of concrete gestures. The most emblematic and evocative one is the opening of the Holy Door in St Peter’s Basilica on Christmas Eve 24 December. Pilgrims go there on pilgrimage, kiss it with devotion, and kneel at the door in prayer. In pilgrimages we experience a journey during which we meet companions on the road. We also experience the concreteness of the sacraments: reconciliation with God in confession – the Eucharist. There is reality in works of penance and charity. The opening the Holy Door is symbolic of the Church opening its arms to a new experience of encounter with the Incarnation, Jesus born for us. He is present among us, He is our Hope and can be touched.

The opening of the Holy Door in St Peter’s constitutes the official beginning of the Holy Year, but the Holy Year will also be celebrated in different countries across the world. In our own Diocese, the official beginning will take place in St Chad’s Cathedral on 29 December and Archbishop Longley will conduct the Solemn opening.

As well as the Holy Door, one of the most characteristic signs of the Jubilee, there are other signs:

Pilgrimage: the word comes from the Latin “per ager” which means “through the fields”, and signifies embarking on a journey. Christ called his disciples to set out after Him, and even today we follow Him and set out afresh after Him. The journey is planned: places to discover and the situations, catechesis, rites and liturgies together with our fellow travellers allow us to be enriched with new matters and perspectives. Pilgrimage is an experience of conversion and connects us towards God’s holiness. As well as Rome itself the Archdiocese has made it possible to enter into the experience of Pilgrimage in the Holy Year through more local places with a long connection to being Pilgrims of Hope (the theme for the Holy Year). One I visited this week is Evesham which has the story of the appearance of Our Lady to the swineherd Eof between 700 and 710 (the first appearance of Our Lady in England) Saint Egwin, Bishop of Worcester, founded an Abbey there following the vision of Mary. The Parish Priest, Father Christopher, is making arrangements for Parish and Chaplaincy pilgrimages on a monthly basis during the Jubilee Year. I can see a wonderful opportunity to join Our Blessed Lady in celebrating the coming of our Lord among us there in a special way and reordering our lives through Charity and the Jubilee Reconciliation and Indulgence (the other great sign of the Jubilee Year). There is so much more to reflect on in the coming Jubilee Year. For the moment I share with you the Jubilee Hymn: Pilgrims of Hope

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



Pilgrims of Hope

Original text: Pierangelo Sequeri
English translation: Andrew Wadsworth

**Like a flame my hope is burning,
may my song arise to you:
Source of life that has no ending,
on life's path I trust in you.**

Ev'ry nation, tongue, and people
find a light within your Word.
Scattered fragile sons and daughters
find a home in your dear Son.

Rit.

God, so tender and so patient,
dawn of hope, you care for all.
Heav'n and earth are recreated
by the Spirit of Life set free.

Rit.

Raise your eyes, the wind is blowing,
for our God is born in time.
Son made man for you and many
who will find the way in him.

Rit.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese