



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

December 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Merry Christmas to you!

Many people come to me at this time of year - as they likely do to you - and ask about my plans for Christmas. What are you going to do? Spend time with family? Travel?

What I suggest to everybody – and I include myself in this – is that among our plans for the Christmas season, we spend some time contemplating the manger scene. I'm sure many of you have your own manger scenes. A particular favourite of mine is one that was carved from olive wood by Christian craftsmen in the Holy Land. But we can fall into the temptation of thinking of them as just one more decoration to put out, something that's nice to have in the house. Let's not do that.

Instead, let's find opportunities to contemplate the significance of that manger scene. Many of you will recognize that in this suggestion, I am conveying to you the same one that has come to us and all the world from our Holy Father, Pope Francis. He recently issued a beautiful short letter ([Admirabile Signum](#), or Remarkable Sign) on contemplating the manger scene, in which he invites all of us to give it a prominent place not just in our homes but in our workplaces, schools, and even in our town squares.

Clearly he is seeing this as something symbolic for each of us as believers but also as carrying a message to the whole world. So let's take this invitation seriously. Find whatever time you can to contemplate the manger scene. Allow it to speak to you. It can have a number of different messages, of course. I'd like to suggest you contemplate particularly the Christ child himself, in the centre of the manger. What does this say, this mystery that God, the Creator of all things, has come to us as a human being, as a child? Keep in mind that the Church tells us that if we want to understand God, if we want to understand the mystery of our own human existence, we must look to Christ. He is true God, and perfect human being. What does contemplating the Child say about our human mystery? Well, the child is particularly vulnerable. The child is weak. The child is radically dependent. Here we find something essential about the mystery of our human existence - something that we can often, if we're not careful, try to gloss over and ignore. It's the truth of our own dependence, our own weakness, our own radical need for God's love and for God's care.

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It's so easy to think that we have to figure things out on our own, do things ourselves, fall into the trap of self-reliance. But the mystery of God as a little child, as we contemplate it in the manger, reveals to us this truth: that we need God. Without God, we simply cannot exist. Without God, we cannot find the peace and the hope and the love for which every human heart longs – the peace, hope, and love that God has come to give us by becoming incarnate, becoming one of us in the Christ child born of the Virgin Mary.

The manger scene can say many things to us as we contemplate the figures of Mary, Joseph, the wise men, the shepherds, and the rest. Allow all of them to speak to you. But above all, at the heart of it, welcome the message of the Child. Allow that to speak to you and uncover anew for you this wondrous truth of our dependence on God, of God's never-failing love for us, and discover the peace and consolation that is ours when we embrace that truth and live from it.

I wish a very blessed, happy and holy Christmas to each of you and your families, and God's every blessing for you in the New Year.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Richard W. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

✠Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton