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## **Bishop Toal's Christmas Message**

In present circumstances it does feel difficult to look forward to Christmas as we are made aware of further restrictions due to the new variant of the coronavirus. Perhaps the ongoing crisis we are living through makes the happy, indeed joyful, celebration of Christmas all the more necessary as we celebrate the presence of God in our midst in the person of the Baby Jesus.

The birth of a child is a moment of great joy and of thanksgiving for the gift of life and the promise of how that life will grow and fulfil its potential through that person's time on earth. Just as the circumstances of Jesus' birth were challenging that can often be the case for others, but it is amazing how even the weakest, the most disadvantaged, do survive and find their place in the human family. Sadly not everybody does and the tragedies surrounding the loss of little children, and unborn babies, are among the hardest that parents and families face. As we acclaim the Child in the Manger as God, born as one of us, we commend to him those who have lost babies and all who are heart-broken over the loss of loved ones of all ages in recent times.

At Christmas we are invited to come to the manger ourselves in the spirit of the shepherds and wise men to do the Lord homage and present ourselves to him, seeking his grace and peace in our own lives. It is what we do constantly as we turn to God in prayer and come together to participate in the celebration of Holy Mass. Coming to the Christmas Crib is an extra beautiful expression of our faith in the Lord made flesh, who has truly dwelt among us. It is an added opportunity to express our desire to remain close to him always and to receive the fullest benefit of his presence within and among us. The words of the last two verses of *Away in a Manger* come to mind:

Be near me Lord Jesus.  
I ask you to stay  
Close by me forever  
And love me I pray.  
Bless all the dear children  
In thy tender care  
And fit us for heaven  
To live with thee there.

I wish you and your families a very Happy and Joyful Christmas and every blessing in 2022.

With my prayers and very best wishes,

Yours in Christ,

**+ Joseph Toal**

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