



The Bishop's Christmas Message 2022

My Christmas message is inspired by a unique event that occurred at our Trinity Church in Shrewsbury. For a weekend they had over 300 Nativity sets from around the world on display. They were on loan from St. Andrew's Church in Ayer which is in the eastern diocese. Another great example of our collaboration in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Bishop Alan Gates and I both attended.

The variety was amazing. Nativity scenes from Asia, Europe, South America, Africa and North America. Some Nativity scenes came with powerful stories like one from Liberia that was made from weapons used in the civil war - just like when we have been transforming guns into farm tools.

It was inspiring to see the Holy Family and the shepherds and wise men looking like the people from the country where the Nativity was made. It reminded me of what the angel said to Joseph in a dream, quoting the prophet Isaiah: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall name him Emmanuel "which means "God is with us." God is with US. That means all of us. These Nativities symbolize that reality. Each holy family says: "This is us."

That same angel also told Joseph to name the baby "Jesus" - which means "saves." God is with us, in all our variety, and transforms us. Saves us. What that looks like is told in one of my favorite prayers called Advent Credo. Here is part of that prayer:

*It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—
This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever
believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life;*

*It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and
destruction—
This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.*

*It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction
rule forever—*

This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful councilor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world—

This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world

It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.

Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world.

The whole world. Merry Christmas!