

*A Time of Unparalleled Joy*

My Dear People of God:

I want to express to you my most sincere and prayerful hopes that the Christmas Season will be for each of you a time of unparalleled joy. I pray that the grace and peace of God our Father, the love of Christ the King and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit will ever abide with each of you.

We now stand on the very threshold of the celebration of the Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is a time when *Silent Night* takes on a most moving and touching significance. One could sing *Silent Night* at any time of the year but it is really only at Christmas when it is mixed with such marvelous graces that it has the capacity to touch our hearts. The reality is that it is God Himself who reaches into our world and touches our hearts. He did this many times over the centuries as recorded in the Old Testament. He talked to Adam, summoned Noah, called Abraham, appointed Moses, anointed David, sent Isaiah, and, at the end of that era, commissioned John the Baptist. Then in the fullness of time God spoke definitively in the Person of His own only Begotten Son, Jesus, the Anointed One.

Christmas thus marks a most welcome entrance of God into our history and into our lives. It is this entrance which we celebrate and relive each Christmas Season. God's word transmitted through prophets and kings certainly had the power to touch the hearts of the Chosen People. The spoken word, however, was not all that God had planned for us. In the fullness of time He sent His Word, His Son, and that Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. God sent His own personal touch into the world and the world figuratively stood still and silent at the event.

It was, as the song notes so wonderfully, a silent night, a holy night, a night divine, a night on which Christ our Savior was born. We enter into that same silent, holy, divine night as we celebrate the Christmas event in our Sacred Liturgy. In that celebration we realize again a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light and upon those who dwelt in the shadow of death, Light has shown." (Isaiah 9:2)

Jesus is our Light. Jesus is our Savior. Jesus is our Redeemer. He sets foot into our world and God dwells among us. May this Christmas be for each of us a Silent Night on which we too stop in silence and experience what the shepherds heard and felt. May we, in silence, hear again the Angels' song. May we once again experience and appreciate more fully the wonderful touch of God. May we not only hear God's word but more importantly meet the personal Word He sends to us.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank you for the warm welcome I have received upon arrival in the Diocese of Santa Rosa. There will undoubtedly be challenges ahead of us but there is no need for us to be afraid as long as we hold firm to the conviction of God's goodness and love. Christmas reminds us again of the presence and providence of God, fills our hearts with hopeful joy and strengthens us to face more boldly and courageously the various challenges of life. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to serve as your Bishop and I look forward with great joy and eager expectation to the many good things we can accomplish together for the sake of God's Kingdom in the Diocese of Santa Rosa.

Asking every good grace and blessing of God upon you, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

The Most Reverend Robert F. Vasa  
Bishop of Santa Rosa