

The Nativity Message of the Most Reverend BENJAMIN, Archbishop of San Francisco and the West

In that day, declares the LORD, I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever.

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”

Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel. And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth. (Micah 4:6-7; 5:2-4, Read on the Eve of the Nativity)

In this most difficult year, as we seemingly limp towards 2021, we gather as always for the feast of the Son of God becoming the Son of Man. It seems so different, so subdued, in this year of pandemic, economic and political turmoil, and social unrest. It is, indeed, difficult to “see” the joy of the feast through the smoke and clouds of current life. But as a very wise priest said to me once, “Are you going to let the world snatch away the Nativity from your heart?”

The Church, in her wisdom, gives us the prophecy from Micah to strengthen us not only in our celebration, but in our standing firm against the winds of difficulty and suffering that buffet us. More than 2,500 years ago, the prophet pointed to the little Child that we come to worship. In the passage read on the eve, two things stand out. First, the coming of Christ will gather and heal the broken, the

lame, the exiles, and those grieving. Can we desire to hear anything more necessary at this moment in time? Suffering, worry, and the paralysis of quarantine have made us “lame” and “broken.” Only the coming of the Son of God can truly heal us.

The prophet also proclaims perhaps the most important reality for us: that in this Child there is hope. The Messiah will “stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord.” The world would have us place our hope in policies, masks, “social distancing,” and vaccines. Those are, with God’s help, incredible and valuable gifts offered through the talents of those caring for us. But, in the long run, they don’t stave off death. Nothing the world can offer does. The world has also tried to manufacture “Christmas spirit” by starting everything earlier than ever this year — “Christmas” music blasting from radios and TVs for weeks now, decorations going up the day after Halloween, and “sales” starting weeks and weeks ago. But, bolstered by the words of the prophet, we find our true Christmas spirit when we place our hope in the One lying in a manger, humbly surrounded by animals and shepherds. And that hope is always fulfilled.

May the brightness of the Child come into the world this day to dispel its darkness enlighten all of you, my beloved flock. May the hope given to us this day never fade away no matter the difficulties facing us. May the Gift that is placed in our hands this day always be received as the only gift that matters.

**Christ is Born! Glorify Him!
In the new-born Child,**

**†Benjamin
Archbishop of San Francisco and the West**