



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

240 E. ONONDAGA STREET, SYRACUSE, NY 13202-2608

Christmas 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The prophet Isaiah cries out to the nations: *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone"* (Is. 9:1). For me, these words are a *"lamp unto our feet and a light for our path"* (cf. Ps. 119:105) as we journey to Bethlehem this Advent/Christmas Season 2021.

In a year that for many of us has been filled with hills and valleys, light and darkness, outwardly represented for some in the recent devastation witnessed in Mayfield, Kentucky, the voice crying out is a beacon in the wasteland! It is epitomized in the small Baptist congregation of Mayfield gathered in the church's parking lot for Sunday worship announcing to all: *"Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!"* (Is. 40:3b).

Yes, brothers and sisters, our God comes to save us! This is the meaning behind the lights and glitter – the Christmas trees and the Nativity scenes – the gift giving and the parties, all are meant to point us and not blind us to one important moment: the Incarnation and Emmanuel – God with us!

As Pope St. Leo the Great would say of this feast: "Our Savior, dearly beloved, was born today: let us be glad. For there is no proper place for sadness, when we keep the birthday of the Life, which destroys the fear of mortality and brings to us the joy of promised eternity. No one is kept from sharing in this happiness. There is for all one common measure of joy, because as our Lord the destroyer of sin and death finds none free from charge, so is He come to free us all. Let the saint exult in that he draws near to victory. Let the sinner be glad in that he is invited to pardon" (Sermon 21 – *On the Feast of the Nativity*).

It is in the face of the loving gaze of our God become man and in the light that radiates from Bethlehem that beckons us to the "House of Bread" – "the Living Bread come down from heaven" (cf. Jn 6). It is in our gathering at Christ's altar – His manger (feeding trough) – that we are invited again and again to encounter Christ's Real Presence among us and to feast upon His Word and the Bread of Life given for the life of the world! So this Christmas in our poverty, let us too, come to Bethlehem and encounter our salvation – the lamp that casts out all darkness and sin and which desires to light our way in life!

It is my simple prayer that the light of Christ will fill your hearts and homes this Christmas and into the New Year. Merry Christmas and a blessed 2022!

In the Name of Jesus,

Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse

Faith • Hope • Charity