

## Lighting of the Tree

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I would like to conclude this ceremony by recalling that in the biography of St. Francis of Assisi, written by Tommaso da Celano, he describes how important the mystery of the Incarnation and the birth of the Son of God was for the Saint, which he celebrated "beyond and above all other solemnities", so much so as to call Christmas the "Feast of all feasts".

In fact, the Poverello of Assisi loved Christmas above all other solemnities, because in it he contemplated the King of glory, who comes into the world to bring peace and the presence of the Lord and Creator.

Similarly, it is still Thomas of Celano who narrates the famous episode in which Saint Clare is the protagonist, who, bedridden by illness and unable to go to the choir to praise the Lord on Christmas Day 1252, the last year of her life, she begins "to think of little Jesus" with such intensity, that suddenly - writes Thomas of Celano - she hears "the wonderful concert that was being held in the church of San Francesco ringing in her ears", as if she too were present there: " she heard the friars chanting in jubilation, she followed the harmonies of the singers, she even perceived the sound of the instruments".

Once again, Francis and Clare, from two different but complementary perspectives, find themselves in unison in the contemplation of God's infinite love for humanity, a wounded and vulnerable humanity, but also rich in its diversity and manifested in its fullness precisely in that Child, the Son of God, a humanity open to gift and capable of gratuitousness. This is also the dynamics of Jesus Christ in his Christmas: the root of life is God who gives himself openly and freely to humanity, emptying himself, who is made flesh to make us like Him.

We too, in front of the crib and the tree, are invited to contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation with the same amazement of so many saints. The art that puts itself at the service of faith and its prime mysteries is represented precisely by the Nativity scene, which skilled hands have created with such care and talent. The tree, on the other hand, represents eternal life and the hope of the resurrection. Pope Francis, on 13 December 2013, in his speech at the pilgrimage from Bavaria for the gift of the tree in St. Peter's Square, explained its meaning as follows: "Even today Jesus continues to dispel the darkness of error and sin, to bring to all humanity the joy of

the dazzling divine light, of which the Christmas tree is a sign and reminder. Let us allow ourselves to be enveloped in the light of his truth”.

It is therefore the light that characterizes the Season of Christmas, that light which Francis and Clare admired, and which Christ radiates on humanity. Standing before this symbol of light and hope, we pray that in this moment in which the pandemic, the war and the economic crisis are putting humanity to the test, a feeling of rebirth and a desire for authentic fraternity will also accompany us.

Let me conclude by addressing my most sincere thanks to all those present here and, with your permission, to our colleagues of the Dicastery for Communication and to all the collaborators of the Governorate of Vatican City State.

In fact, they are the ones whose contributions have made the Nativity scene and the tree available to the faithful and visitors, having prepared a worthy home in the setting of St. Peter's Square for these beautiful creations.

With sincere joy I take this opportunity to wish you all a happy Advent and a blessed Christmas season.