
Rejoice in the Lord



By Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Newark



Christmas is a Feast of Joy in Heaven, on Earth

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

After many months of isolation, economic hardships and the illness and death caused by the pandemic, we are more than ready for the joy of Christmas. The way we celebrate will be different this year because of social distancing and travel restrictions but celebrate we must!

Do you think the saints and angels celebrate Christmas in heaven? I hope so. This is a wonderful feast—filled with warmth and love, peace and joy. I know that every day in heaven is delightful, but maybe even heavenly bliss can be turned up a notch—at least one day a year—with the magnificent voice of an angelic choir and the brilliant glow of a shining star!

I can just imagine the joy that our Blessed Mother and all the saints must feel on this very special day. Do you suppose that if we asked them with humble hearts this Christmas Day, they would open the gates of heaven—just enough—to let their joy overflow, filling our troubled world with a small share of the happiness and peace they possess in eternal life with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

We associate “joy” with Christmas. Do we know what joy is? Have we experienced it lately?

In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, the English writer C. S. Lewis speaks of joy as something very different from pleasure or even happiness. Joy is something deeper, richer and more elusive. It takes us by surprise and affects us profoundly. Joy is the satisfaction of our deepest desires. It is intimately connected to the longing for God that St. Augustine referred to when he wrote that our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

When I was a boy in elementary school, the Sisters gave us a very simple—but profound—tool for learning what joy is. They told us that when you spell j-o-y, the “j” stands for Jesus who should always come first in our lives. The “o” stands for others who come second. And the “y” stands for yourself. Place Jesus first, others second, and yourself last of all, and you will know joy.

Isn't it amazing how these simple teaching devices cut right to the heart of the matter? Volumes of philosophy, theology and spirituality have been written on the notion of joy and happiness. The nuances they contain are important, I believe for the fullness or accuracy of our understanding, but what the Sisters taught is no less profound. If you place Jesus first in your life, if you think of others before you think of yourself, you will be surprised by joy!

Jesus Christ is the greatest Christmas gift, the source of all real joy, the reason for the season. He is the gift of God the Father, the Divine Word who by the power of Holy Spirit became one of us in all things but sin. This amazing gift was first given to Mary, and then to all of us, to save us from the devastating power of sin and death. During this time of pandemic, social unrest and economic hardship, we need this gift of God's love more than ever!

This is what we celebrate at Christmas time—on Earth as, I hope, in heaven: The day when we call to mind most vividly the mystery of the Incarnation and the joy of Christ's birth. Christmas celebrates the joy, the fulfillment, of all human desiring.

All other Christmas gifts pale in comparison to this one: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:16-17).

On Christmas Day, and throughout this joyous season, we are invited to join with Mary, and all the angels and saints, in a joy-filled festival of happiness and peace. In heaven, there are no tears, no sorrow and no worries about tomorrow.

Because heaven is not really a place—a geographic location—but is an experience of loving closeness (communion) with the God who is our hearts' desire, it's hard to imagine what this grand celebration of heavenly joy looks like. We like to use images of music and dancing and sumptuous food because that's what our earthly celebrations are like, but we really don't know for certain what Christmas is like in heaven.

The joy in heaven on Christmas Day cannot be accurately described in earthly words or images, but we believe with all our hearts that those who have gone before us to our heavenly home rejoice on this day. And, as I say above, we hope and pray that this joy will spill over and bring peace on Earth—today and always.

Jesus is our j-o-y. When we place him first, others second and ourselves third, everything falls into proper perspective.

I pray you enjoy a peaceful and faith-filled Christmas season—and may God Bless you and your loved ones. Merry Christmas!

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,



Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Newark

Vigilance Against COVID-19

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

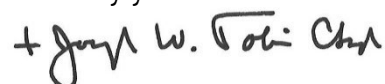
As we approach the commemoration of the Savior's birth, I invite you to join me in maintaining our vigilance against COVID-19 and thereby offer a gift of love to our neighbors, especially the most vulnerable. Together we can celebrate safely and responsibly by maintaining safeguarding measures, including wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, and using mobile technology to vanquish this terrible virus.

You can learn more on tips and guidance for how to safely observe holiday traditions like caroling, visiting Santa, or traveling for the holidays at <https://covid19.nj.gov/faqs/nj-information/slowing-the-spread/how-can-i-safely-celebrate-the-holiday-season#direct-link>.

You can also help by downloading the COVID Alert NJ app and encouraging family, friends, and neighbors to do the same. COVID Alert NJ is an exposure notification mobile app that anonymously notifies users of potential exposure to COVID-19 while maintaining user privacy and security. It is free and secure, available to anyone 18 or older who lives, works, or attends college in New Jersey; I have one on my cell phone. The app can be downloaded from the Google Play Store or Apple App Store (go to <https://covid19.nj.gov/pages/app>). The more people that download the app on their phones, the better we can fight this pandemic. The states of New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware have cooperated to ensure all COVID Alert exposure notification apps will work across the region.

May the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, bless you and yours!

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,



Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Newark

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Happy Christmas! I wish to encourage the beautiful family tradition of preparing the nativity scene in the days before Christmas, but also the custom of setting it up in the workplace, in schools, hospitals,



prisons, and town squares. Great imagination and creativity is always shown in employing the most diverse materials to create small masterpieces of beauty. As children, we learn from our parents and grandparents to carry on this joyful tradition, which encapsulates a wealth of popular piety. It is my hope that this custom will never be lost and that, wherever it has fallen into disuse, it can be rediscovered and revived... Why does the Christmas crèche arouse such wonder and move us

so deeply? First, because it shows God's tender love: the Creator of the universe lowered himself to take up our littleness. The gift of life, in all its mystery, becomes all the more wondrous as we realize that the Son of Mary is the source and sustenance of all life... He gave us his Son who forgives us and frees us from our sins.

Setting up the Christmas crèche in our homes helps us to relive the history of what took place in Bethlehem. Naturally, the Gospels remain our source for understanding and reflecting on that event. At the same time, its portrayal in the crèche helps us to imagine the scene... as contemporaries of an event that is living and real... The Christmas crèche is part of the precious yet demanding process of passing on the faith. Beginning in childhood, and at every stage of our lives, it teaches us to contemplate Jesus, to experience God's love for us, to feel and believe that God is with us and that we are with him, his children, brothers and sisters all, thanks to that Child who is the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin Mary.

To you, the faithful of Rome, to you, the pilgrims, and to all who are linked to us from every part of the world, I renew the joyous proclamation of Bethlehem: "Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace among those whom he favors" (Luke 2:14). Like the shepherds who first went with haste to the stable, let us halt in wonder before the sign that God has given us: "A baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12). In silence, let us fall to our knees and worship.


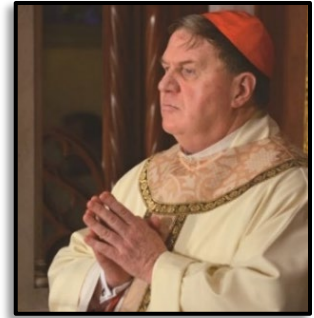
What does that Child, born for us of the Virgin Mary, have to tell us? What is the universal message of Christmas? It is that God is a good Father and we are all brothers and sisters.




My Prayer for You

Thank you, Heavenly Father, for the marvelous gift of your only Son, our Redeemer. Help us be good stewards of Christmas joy by sharing it generously with others this Christmas season and through the New Year.

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.



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of NEWARK




JOIN VIA LIVESTREAM

CHRISTMAS EVE MASS

Celebrated by Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin

Midnight • Christmas Eve, December 24

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