



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 22 December 2004

The mystery of Christmas

1. At this time of the final preparation for the Christmas celebrations, the liturgy presents to us repeatedly the invocation "*Come, Lord Jesus*". It is like a refrain that wells up from the hearts of believers in every corner of the earth and ceaselessly echoes in the prayer of the Church.

We have also just invoked the coming of Christ as we sang today's "*O*" *Antiphon*. In it the Messiah is called by titles taken from the biblical tradition that are especially beautiful and meaningful: "King of nations" and the "Desired" of all nations, the "Cornerstone who makes all one".

2. At Christmas, we will contemplate the great mystery of God made man in the Virgin Mary's womb. He was born in Bethlehem *to share our frail human condition!* He comes to dwell among us and brings salvation to the whole world. His mission will be to gather individuals and peoples into the one family of God's children. We can say that in the Mystery of Christmas we are granted to contemplate *a "qualitative leap" in the history of salvation*. Man who through sin distanced himself from the Creator is now offered the gift of new and full communion with him.

Thus, hope is rekindled in his heart, while the gates of paradise are re-opened to humanity.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, the celebration of Christmas, now at hand, is a favourable opportunity for everyone to live more deeply the value and significance of the great event of Jesus' birth.

This is my *hope* for all of you who are taking part in this General Audience, for your families and

for the Communities from which you come.

To special groups

I extend a special welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims here today, including groups from the United States of America. Upon all of you I invoke the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and I wish you many blessings during the holy season of Christmas.

I would also like to greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*.

Dear friends, I thank you for taking part in this meeting. May the Lord who comes to visit us in the mystery of Christmas bring comfort and hope to all.