

## Difficult, hopeful Christmas

This is a difficult Christmas.

There is no really getting around it.

Some of us have lost someone to the pandemic. Many know someone who is sick.

More than a few are struggling financially.

Most of us will be "celebrating" while apart.

For some, it will be the first Christmas "alone."

There is a stress and exhaustion that is palpable.

This *is* a difficult Christmas.

It is good to remember that the "first Christmas" was born amidst difficulty.

Joseph and his wife, Mary, were poor and away from home. As Mary was going into labor with her child, there was no place to stay. So their new-born had to be kept in a manger.

A *manger* is a feedbox or feeding trough for animals. Mangers are usually filthy and smelly, rife with insects.

These new parents were on the outskirts of an out-of-the-way town at a time when mothers and children frequently died during childbirth.

God entered the world in a messy, difficult place.

Christmas reminds us that God enters the world in messy, difficult times and places.

Whether Bethlehem or Boston or West Boylston, or our families or our hearts.

Just as God took on the flesh of a poor Jewish baby, so as to dispel the darkness with light, the same God, yearns to take on our flesh, hearts and minds, so as to bring his compassion and love into the world.

So Christmas might be difficult. But it is *always* hopeful.

It is always hopeful because right now, Christ is being born in the hearts of all kinds of people, some who resemble us, many who don't.

All over the world, humans of every variety of our species are saying "yes" to the Prince of Peace, yearning to enflesh his healing compassion for others.

In a million different ways from soup kitchens to awkward zoom meetings to hospital ER's, to research laboratories to parishes like our own, people are striving and struggling to be a blessing to others.

So yeah, difficult but *always* hopeful...

Sixteen hundred years ago, Pope Leo the Great, wrote this in his Christmas homily to the people of Rome:

*"God became human, so that humans might become more like God."*

So on this strange Christmas in the face of an uncertain winter:

May our hearts be open to receive Christ,  
striving to bring to birth his compassion,  
sustained by hope  
through our every winter of this life, unto eternal spring.

*Amen.*

Fr. Steven Labaire