My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Christmas brings joy to the world and joy to our hearts as we contemplate and celebrate Christ's birth at Bethlehem.

We can readily appreciate Mary's joy as she gazed on the beauty, mystery and wonder of her newborn Son. It is a joy all mothers experience and one fathers and families share as they welcome and appreciate the gift of new life.

Mary's joy was deepened by the wondrous knowledge that the Child she bore was also God's Eternal Son who, through her, took on a human nature to be with us and to save us. That presence brought joy to a cold and drafty cave where Mary and Joseph took shelter with animals. Christ's presence brings joy to us no matter what our circumstances.

We marvel not only that God's Son took on our human nature, but that we, through the baptism Jesus instituted, also gain a share in God's divine life. Jesus is God's Son by nature. Through baptism we become God's children by adoption. And just as God was truly in Mary's arms in the Infant Jesus, so too, though in a different way, God is with us in our souls through baptism. Our God is not distant, indifferent or detached from our lives. He is with us. He is Emmanuel.

The Christmas Season begins with the birth of Christ and ends with the Feast of His baptism. The Season with all its beautiful liturgies, traditions and customs will quickly pass. However, for those who have become God's adopted sons and daughters through baptism and who remain in His grace, God does not pass from us. We have His presence, strength and peace with us always. Like Mary and Joseph we will face uncertainties, disappointments and unexpected trials, but we do not face them alone. We are aided by a strength greater than our own.

May the enduring presence of Christ to you and all the baptized extend the joy of Christmas and the blessings of God throughout the New Year and all of life.

With every prayerful best wish, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus
Bishop of Worcester