



## Message for Christmas 2022

Your Excellencies, confreres, consœurs,

The mosaic in the cathedral of Monreale depicting the Nativity of Jesus is inspired by oriental icons. The child inside a cave is placed in a cradle and is wrapped in swaddling clothes like a corpse laid in the tomb and wrapped in bandages. The wrapping of the newborn Jesus recalls that of his body removed from the cross and prepared to be buried in a cave. If on the one hand this indicates the commonality of Jesus's destiny with every human person, whose earthly life unfolds from the cradle to the grave, on the other hand it recalls the totality of the Gospel which has its culminating moment in the resurrection of Christ in which his divinity is manifested, which conquers death. From Easter, peace is poured out upon all humanity and upon all creation as a gift of God.

The Nativity of Jesus Christ, in which the glory of God in heaven is combined with peace on earth for the people he loves, gives us the joy of being embraced by God and of loving ourselves and all our brothers and sisters. The Son of God is born as a child of the earth so that we can be born as children of heaven, destined for eternity. In the mystery of Christmas, heaven and earth are united in a covenant of love as the prophet Isaiah had foretold in the prophecies in which the instruments of war will become instruments of peace to cultivate the earth (Is.2,4) and the hostile animals will be reconciled (Is.11,6-8) with the arrival of Emmanuel.

In the Bible the gift of peace is the fullness of messianic goods: justice, freedom, health, well-being, prosperity, joy, the fullness of life. Jesus, who is the "Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6) and "our Peace" (Eph. 2:14), is the mediator of peace sustained by hope and enlivened by love. The peace that the Lord leaves us is very different from that which the world gives, based on the lust for political and economic power, on national pride, on the law of the strongest, on the oppression of the weak. It is not peace through the absence of conflicts; it is not peace that is based on the motto "If you want peace, prepare for war" or on the other hand "They made a desert and called it peace". Peace is a challenge that needs to be accepted day after day in the inseparable dimensions of peace of heart within oneself, peace with others in the family, in one's own community and among nations, and peace with creation. Those who desire peace do not destroy, but create bridges of solidarity and acceptance.

This Christmas we should commit ourselves to pray for an end to the spiral of violence and the roar of arms in Ukraine and in other parts of the world, and for a beginning to taking steps towards a peace based on justice that renews hope.

**+ Msgr. Michele Pennisi**

**Archbishop Emeritus of Monreale & Ecclesiastical Grand Prior**