

PRAYER SERVICE FOR MERCY SISTERS AND ASSOCIATES

“in radical communion beyond all borders” this Christmas Eve or Day, 2008.

“REJOICE, Our Earth is Touched Afresh by LOVE”

INVITATION TO PRAYER:

We pause for prayer in remembrance of the birth of our Saviour and in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus who first touched our earth in love by being born as one of us.

With Mary we embrace the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, which – not unlike our own in these days of recession – was unplanned, unprovided for; appeared to terminate in feelings of embarrassment, temporary homelessness, unemployment, an empty wallet and with only the comfort of a fresh replenished and welcoming manger – would give us our Saviour.

We welcome the opportunity to see ourselves as today's hillside shepherds who are given an unconditional invitation to wrestle with our own brokenness. We accept that the quality of our response to this Divine Invitation will determine whether or not we become tomorrows 'royal visitors' in a new and graced Bethlehem. In faith we pray:

All together: Provident God, touch us and our earth afresh with Love today and enable us to rejoice and sing. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING LK 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.

He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.



REFLECTION:

Mary, in this Gospel reading I feel that I and my world can identify with you and your world in a unique way. Circumstances beyond your control forced you and your husband to make that uncertain and hazardous journey at a time and in a season when no prospective mother would contemplate travelling.

Despite the temporary uplift which Jesus' safe birth, the songs of the angels, the visit of the shepherds brought to you and to Joseph, the manger would be only a temporary cradle.

Yet in time it would become a symbol of the ultimate in hospitality when your Son would not only become both the Manger and the Hay for the world's hungry, troubled and God fearing, but their Redeemer.

There must have been many occasions on the way to Bethlehem and in the succeeding years, when you asked God why, as a faithful member of the Chosen People, you and your family were taken from:

stability to insecurity

independence to reliance

certainty to ambiguity

joy to sorrow, and

opulence in Nazareth to poverty in Bethlehem.

What was God telling you? "...*the world should be registered* ..." If so why just when you were at your most vulnerable? Why were you being challenged? Why had you been called "*favoured one*" by Gabriel, and so quickly become a victim of the Emperor's greed?

In our world today, Mary, many of us, your children, are suffering a similar plight. We too, have become victims of not only today's greedy 'emperors', but in many cases, of our own uncontrollable self-indulgence, insatiable consumerism and unappeasable desire for dollars, pounds, the euros, power and status.

We have moved from:

Sabbath and Sacrament to the transience of selfishness and sport

Eucharist and Elevation to the veneration of the erotic and entertainment

Doxologies and devotions to worship of the dollar and day-dreaming.

Now the Divine Emperor seems to have intervened, thrown a metaphorical brick at us challenging us to moving, however reluctant, from:

self-sufficiency to dependence on family and community

isolation to inclusion

fast-foods to family meals

the air to the Altar

mansions to the Manger

Provident God, as I pray, I ask myself: Is this Love's way of touching our earth afresh and taking us from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order to enable us to return from self-sufficiency to Sacraments and from the superficiality of temporary 'mansions' to a life-giving and permanent relationship with the Master of the Manger? PAUSE



LET US PRAY:

Saviour of the world, born in simplicity and joy; cradled in a welcoming manger and nursed by Mary and Joseph, we rejoice with you in your simplicity as we come before you in prayer this Christmas, praying:

Joy of God	<i>be the source of our joy</i>
Happiness of God	<i>be unity in our families</i>
Grace of God	<i>be compassion to us sinners</i>
Calm of God	<i>be our tranquillity in our times of trouble</i>
Care of God	<i>be comfort in those who are mentally ill</i>
Hope of God	<i>be optimism to the down-hearted</i>
Manger of God	<i>be our Eucharist as we journey through uncertain times</i>
Way of God	<i>be a sure path for those seeking employment</i>
Light of God	<i>be hope to the those who have lost their financial security</i>
Image of God	<i>be reflected in our words and in our actions</i>
Hospitality of God	<i>be our welcome to the rejected and the homeless</i>
Harmony of God	<i>be our reconciliation and peace</i>
Integrity of God	<i>be the conscience of each of us and of our leaders</i>
Justice of God	<i>be our truth and that of our policy makers</i>
Silence of God	<i>be the tongue of our voiceless and bullied</i>
Word of God	<i>be Good News to all seekers</i>
Thanksgiving of God	<i>be our blessing as we journey in renewed faith and trust</i>
Salvation of God	<i>be our Host at the Paschal Banquet.</i>



CONCLUDING PRAYER:

Jesus, our Saviour, as we prepare to celebrate your birth with joy and thanksgiving grant that your coming among us anew, your showing us the human face and the unique Providence of our God as: simplicity of life, equality in hospitality, openness to the stranger, the shepherd, king and the peasant may inspire us to imitate you in humility and truth. May we re-commit ourselves to developing a greater reverence for the manger and use it as a metaphor of hope in our proclamation of the Good News in these days of recession, uncertainty, and searching; and as we move from an age of materialism, consumerism, self-sufficiency and overwhelming greed to one generosity, faith, relationship and sharing. We make this prayer through your intercession with our Creator and the Holy Spirit in response to your new invitation to a more positive, faith-filled and holistic value system. In joy we sing: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

BLESSING:

May we allow our Saviour who has touched our earth afresh with love this year, and called us anew to faith and hope, to inspire all our decisions and actions in the coming year.

May the challenge of Emperor Augustus, the brightness of the stars, the joy of the shepherds, the wisdom of the three royal visitors and the music of the angels inspire us this Christmas Morning and every morning in the year ahead. Amen.

May we experience and recognise new blessings in our lives, in the name of our God who created us, Jesus who redeemed † us and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us and now and forever. Amen.

