

TEXT -- Pope Francis delivers annual Christmas message

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USPA News - Pope Francis on Wednesday delivered his first Christmas message after being elected the head of the Catholic Church earlier this year. He made the annual address in Italian, but translated to English below, from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. -- Begins -- Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours (Lk 2:14) Dear brothers and sisters in Rome and throughout the whole world, Greetings and Happy Christmas! I take up the song of the angels who appeared to the shepherds in Bethlehem on the night when Jesus was born.

It is a song which unites heaven and earth, giving praise and glory to heaven, and the promise of peace to earth and all its people. I ask everyone to share in this song: it is a song for every man or woman who keeps watch through the night, who hopes for a better world, who cares for others while humbly seeking to do his or her duty. Glory to God! Above all else, this is what Christmas bids us to do: give glory to God, for he is good, he is faithful, he is merciful. Today I voice my hope that everyone will come to know the true face of God, the Father who has given us Jesus. My hope is that everyone will feel God's closeness, live in his presence, love him and adore him. May each of us give glory to God above all by our lives, by lives spent for love of him and of all our brothers and sisters. Peace to mankind True peace - we know this well - is not a balance of opposing forces. It is not a lovely "façade" which conceals conflicts and divisions. Peace calls for daily commitment, but making peace is an art, starting from God's gift, from the grace which he has given us in Jesus Christ. Looking at the Child in the manger, Child of peace, our thoughts turn to those children who are the most vulnerable victims of wars, but we think too of the elderly, to battered women, to the sick? Wars shatter and hurt so many lives! Too many lives have been shattered in recent times by the conflict in Syria, fueling hatred and vengeance. Let us continue to ask the Lord to spare the beloved Syrian people further suffering, and to enable the parties in conflict to put an end to all violence and guarantee access to humanitarian aid. We have seen how powerful prayer is! And I am happy today too, that the followers of different religious confessions are joining us in our prayer for peace in Syria. Let us never lose the courage of prayer! The courage to say: Lord, grant your peace to Syria and to the whole world. And I also invite non-believers to desire peace with that yearning that makes the heart grow: all united, either by prayer or by desire. But all of us, for peace. Grant peace, dear Child, to the Central African Republic, often forgotten and overlooked. Yet you, Lord, forget no one! And you also want to bring peace to that land, torn apart by a spiral of violence and poverty, where so many people are homeless, lacking water, food and the bare necessities of life. Foster social harmony in South Sudan, where current tensions have already caused too many victims and are threatening peaceful coexistence in that young state. Prince of Peace, in every place turn hearts aside from violence and inspire them to lay down arms and undertake the path of dialogue. Look upon Nigeria, rent by constant attacks which do not spare the innocent and defenseless. Bless the land where you chose to come into the world, and grant a favourable outcome to the peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians. Heal the wounds of the beloved country of Iraq, once more struck by frequent acts of violence. Lord of life, protect all who are persecuted for your name. Grant hope and consolation to the displaced and refugees, especially in the Horn of Africa and in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Grant that migrants in search of a dignified life may find acceptance and assistance. May tragedies like those we have witnessed this year, with so many deaths at Lampedusa, never occur again! Child of Bethlehem, touch the hearts of all those engaged in human trafficking, that they may realize the gravity of this crime against humanity. Look upon the many children who are kidnapped, wounded and killed in armed conflicts, and all those who are robbed of their childhood and forced to become soldiers. Lord of heaven and earth, look upon our planet, frequently exploited by human greed and rapacity. Help and protect all the victims of natural disasters, especially the beloved people of the Philippines, gravely affected by the recent typhoon. Dear brothers and sisters, today, in this world, in this humanity, is born the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. Let us pause before the Child of Bethlehem. Let us allow our hearts to be touched, let us not fear this. Let us not fear that our hearts be moved. We need this! Let us allow ourselves to be warmed by the tenderness of God; we need his caress. God's caresses do not harm us. They give us peace and strength. We need his caresses. God is full of love: to him be praise and glory forever! God is peace: let us ask him to help us to be peacemakers each day, in our life, in our families, in our cities and nations, in the whole world. Let us allow ourselves to be moved by God's goodness. -- Ends --.

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