

HAPPY CHRISTMAS

I'd like to wish you much joy and happiness this Christmas! I'm Bishop Philip. I come originally from Altrincham, Cheshire and until September I was a priest of the Diocese of Shrewsbury. I was the parish priest of Our Lady and St. Christopher's church in Romiley, near Stockport. But in the summer, the holy father asked me to become Bishop of Portsmouth in succession to Bishop Crispian, who was our bishop for over twenty years. I was ordained on 21st September. These are early days, but like you today, down here I am a long way from my family and friends. I very much wanted to say Mass for you today and I am grateful to Canon Richard for arranging this for us, and so here we are!

Christmas to me is always a wonderful season. The days are short and dark, but now that we've passed the shortest day of the year, the light will increase and the days get longer. There is something very symbolic about this. It tells us about the impact on human life of the Coming of Jesus, the Son of God, the Light of the World. When history had reached its lowest point, when humanity had become meaningless, when people thought things were grim, where's there was sin and despair, the Light of Christ came into the world to transform things. We too can find light and salvation in Jesus Christ the Lord. For the child born for us today is not just a holy man or a great teacher; he is God the Son made man, the Light and Saviour of the World. To find him and the transforming Light he brings, we need only turn to him in prayer, in the sacraments and above all here in the Mass. Indeed, if I can unite myself with Him, he will change my life, raise me up, free me from my sins and bring me one day to heaven. This is what we celebrate today, and why, as we look to the Crib, we can be full of joy: TODAY A SAVIOUR HAS BEEN BORN TO US; HE IS CHRIST THE LORD.

So in this Mass, let us ask the prayers of Mary and Joseph: may they show us the way to Jesus. As I pray for you, please pray for me and for the priests and people of our diocese. Let us pray too for all who are in need: the unborn child, the elderly and lonely, our loved ones and the souls in Purgatory, our fellow prisoners and staff, the sick and those who care for them, the homeless and the addicted, those who will die today, and all who long for justice and peace.