

**THE CHURCH'S MISSION THIS CHRISTMAS**

Recently, the results of the 2011 Census came out. Britain is unique in that since the first census in 1851, there has always been a question on religion and so, sociologists have a lot of data to work with. In the 2011 Census, we learn that the number of people who say they are Christian has fallen from 71 to 59% and the number of non-believers has doubled to 1 in 4. We know too that many people today have strange ideas: that God is Fate, a far-off impersonal Force, an old man on a throne. They do not know God personally as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Yet tonight THE PEOPLE THAT WALKED IN DARKNESS HAS SEEN A GREAT LIGHT. Tonight we see Who God is, what he's really like. Tonight we see, in the arms of Mary and the care of Joseph, the One Whom Isaiah calls WONDER-COUNSELLOR, MIGHTY GOD, ETERNAL FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE. Christmas is the feast of Divine Revelation. It shows us that only a God who is utterly transcendent can be so imminent as to become a baby in a crib! This is our amazing God, the true God, the Creator of all that's visible and invisible, the Person-God who invites us to know, serve and love him, the God who touches our hearts and calls us his friends.

The religious landscape of Britain today is challenging. It gives urgency to the Year of Faith, and that work of new evangelisation the holy father is calling us to. Life is busy. It's easy to be absorbed with work, money, shopping and entertainment. It's easy to drift and get lost. It's easy to forget the sacred canopy that gives height, depth, meaning and purpose to human life and to all that we do. Even Catholics 'horizontalise', living as if the Other World of heaven is more a light at the end of life's long tunnel, than a sacramental reality enfolding us here and now. Christmas reminds us that as human beings we need God. We need meaning and purpose in life. More, we need healing and redemption. Or else – this is a real danger in Mr. Cameron's Britain - we're heading for oblivion and social collapse in a groundless moral universe. This is why Christ came. It's true: in that Crib is the answer to Martin Heidegger's question, Why something rather than nothing? But as St. Leo says we also have here an admirabile commercium, an extraordinary exchange. For the God who became Man reveals not only who **He** is but who **we** are. Indeed, in that Crib, we see not only God the Son but the New Adam, a Perfect Human, the Truth about what you and I are called to become. Jesus shews us what it means to be human: how to live life to the full, how to be people of self-sacrificing love, how to integrate our sexuality, how to struggle for justice and freedom, how to overcome sin, suffering and even death itself. It's this that makes our annual celebration of Christmas crucial.

TODAY A SAVIOUR HAS BEEN BORN TO US. HE IS CHRIST THE LORD. The Catholic Church's mission in modern Britain is 'anthropological'. We are here to save *people*. We are here to offer the natural way of life. We are here to propose an authentic humanism. We are here to help people live life to the full and one day to reach eternal happiness. The Census reminds us of this mission. So in this Mass, in which we celebrate the enfleshment of God the Son for us and for our salvation, let's review our priorities for the year ahead. Let's resolve to put Jesus first: to love him, to pray to him, to attend Sunday Mass, to receive the sacraments, to know Jesus in the Bible and the Catechism, to serve him each day in our work and play. In every Mass, Jesus comes down from heaven to feed us with himself, his Heart burning with love for us. In this Mass, in which we rejoice that TODAY A SAVIOUR HAS BEEN BORN TO US, venite adoremus – come, let us adore Him.