



**Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM**  
**Custos of the Holy Land**  
*Christmas Message 2012*

“Console my people, console them,” says your God. “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and cry to her that her period of service is ended, that her guilt has been atoned for, that, from the hand of the Lord, she has received double punishment for all her sins.” *Isaiah 40:1-2.*

Jesus answered: “In all truth I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again.” *John 3:3.*

It is Christmas. It is the time during which, in our minds and in our hearts we ponder on the question that personally asks of us the significance of this birth that shook history, 2000 years ago, in Bethlehem of Judea. After having overcome the avalanche of nice words and good sentiments that overwhelm us during this season, we must truly try to ask ourselves if, and to what extent, that birth, even today, continues to affect us. During Advent, John the Baptist presents Jesus to us as the realization of the good news of consolation. Jesus is the consolation that becomes flesh and that we can touch with our hands. John proclaims that the consolation, now, is a certainty and not just a prophecy of a future liberation.

Jesus is here, in our midst, as a gift and presence of God. He is the visible manifestation of God’s love for us. Today, as of old, we should ask ourselves whether our heart and our intelligence have placed their trust in this presence and whether they have found in it consolation. The new world is the kingdom of God. In order to welcome it, in order to see it, we need to be reborn. We cannot understand anything of what we are saying if we do not become new, free, and capable of welcoming this novelty.

When we let ourselves become involved in Christmas, it means that we are in a position to be reborn and to begin anew, with trust, with determination, with a serene awareness of the commitment that this new birth demands of us. Fear, suspicion, the incapacity to believe that the other person can change, that I can change, that love can be born again, that consolation is not a fantasy... sometimes all these attitudes prevail and paralyse us. It is the shadow of death and the slavery of Satan. We, however, belong to Christ. For this reason we want, like John the Baptist, to shout aloud that our slavery is finished. We are ready and eager to be born once again and to be born from above, with the force of his love, with the power of his Spirit.



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Our Christian communities in the Holy Land, in Syria and in the Middle East in general, are going through a severe trial. Families, as well as religious communities, are being put to test by wars, persecutions, abandonment and solitude. We do not have the material means to help all and we feel helpless. Even more serious is the widespread sentiment of a lack of trust regarding the future, the will to abandon everything and go away, not to believe in anything or in anyone any more. The book of the consolations of Isaiah, which nurtures our prayer in this period, contains also the Canticles of the Suffering Servant. Consolation and hope do not cancel suffering and pain, but they render them powerless. Death and destruction during these times do not cancel our desire to live and to be reborn. Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event, which the Lord has made known to us (Lk 2:15).

It is Christmas: my best wishes and those of the Franciscans of the Holy Land for all the persons who live in the Holy Land, and for those who look at us from all over the world, are that we should let ourselves be once more conquered by the love of God and by the living desire and the concrete will to begin anew at all costs. We need and want to go to Bethlehem, in order to verify what has happened there for all of us: we have been born again, and we are once more capable of smiling and of gratuitousness.

**A blessed Christmas to all.**

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