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Christmas 2017

Dearest Sisters and Friends,

Once again we have come to this special time of the year when we celebrate a very natural yet astounding event. God has come to his people in the birth of a baby. The simple story of Christmas is that our God has come among us in Jesus, born of Mary at Bethlehem in Judea, and that, in Jesus, God-is-with-us.

The story of Christmas is that we are loved and our sins are forgiven; that a light has shone in our darkness – a light the darkness could not overcome. God has sent his Son to be born among us. It is so simple and yet so incredibly wonderful. Each year we make the journey back to Bethlehem in our hearts to rediscover our own roots in the gift of God wrapped in swaddling clothes. It is a journey home.

Our Christmas card has been chosen to mark the 50th anniversary of the presence of the Infant Jesus Sisters in Africa. The sisters in Cameroon are taking a year of preparation before the celebration of this great event in May next year. The journey to Africa in 1968, a new continent for the sisters, echoes many journeys taken by the Infant Jesus sisters since our foundation more than three hundred and fifty years ago. It was a journey into the unknown, undertaken with the courage and daring that continues to mark the missionary endeavours we are currently involved in with our many friends and collaborators throughout the world.



regarded as outcasts. These simple, humble people follow the instructions of the angel in spite of their initial fear and set out immediately to look for the child, “*wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger*” (Lk.2:12).

Each year we hear again the ancient yet timeless Christmas story. Each year we retell the astonishing entrance that God made into our broken world and we are moved in the depths of our being by the constant surprise of God’s immense love. Something brand-new had happened: something original and fresh and pristine had been revealed; nothing would ever be the same again. God made the crucial choice to break the silence of the ages to give himself away in a Word. The most important Word that God has ever spoken took flesh in the womb of a teenage girl and like all human flesh was born as a fragile bundle of new life. The mystery of God’s love was made flesh in a child. The length, breadth, depth and height of God’s love was somehow expressed in this little one. God was choosing to visit his people, not through the dreams and words of the prophets but in human flesh and bone. The God who abided in the highest heavens chose to live among us.

The Christmas story we hear each year is the same but we are different. Our world is different. Joy and sorrow, laughter and tears, have wrought changes, for better or for worse, in all our lives. But no matter what changes we have undergone, what losses we have mourned, what gains we have celebrated, the Christmas story speaks to us again of new birth and the possibility of our own rebirth. In our celebration of the birth of Jesus this year a new



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adventure in faith begins. A new approach to God is opened up for us, a new way of relating to each other is asked of us. It may be an old story, but it is one that is always pregnant with new hope.

God's message at Christmas is very clear. God speaks to us of hope and tenderness, as Pope Francis tells us. Hope is so important as of ourselves we can easily lose heart. But God always opens doors for us, he never closes them. He opens the doors of compassion, mercy and forgiveness so that we can lift up our heads again and go forward in hope, in his unswerving love.



'Do not be
precarious

afraid of tenderness', Pope Francis tells us. In the helplessness of the baby we see God very close to us, in circumstances, asking us not only to trust ourselves to him but also to express ourselves to him with all the gentleness and tenderness that is in our hearts. This is the Lord of love who invites us into a relationship of love. And in all our loving, we show our own vulnerability and joy in the tenderness we have for each other. So too it is with the Lord, as the Christmas story makes so clear.

Christmas is for marvelling at what once took place, but it is also for continuing to give God flesh in the world. Telling the story means living the story. We become the story of Christmas for those who have never heard it or no longer believe in it.

The theme of the forthcoming Council of the Institute, "Stay Awake! New ways are opening before us!" reminds us to 'wake up the world' and celebrate the joy of Emmanuel, God-with-us! God's love, made flesh in Jesus, takes flesh in each one of us and makes anything possible. Let us pray for one another in preparation for this meeting in Malaysia, that we may remain awake and alert to possibilities that we may not yet have dreamt of!

In the light of the Christ-child, at Christmas we seek to open our hearts again to welcome Christ into our lives, not simply to console us in our difficulties, but to teach us how to live each day. As Paul said to the young Titus: *'God's grace has been revealed...and taught us that what we have to do is to give up everything that does not lead to God...to live good lives...while we are waiting in hope...having no ambition except to do good'* (Titus 2.11-14).

Who could have known what the birth of this child would mean for Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi and for all the people down through the centuries, including each one of us, who prepare every year for this sign of hope?

Let Emmanuel, God-with-us come to meet us at Christmas. Let us not go missing. Let him enter. Let him lead. Then we shall indeed be full of the joy of the knowledge and love of the Lord. Then we shall be ready to speak to others of the gift and consolation of our faith, inviting them to share with us in this pathway of life. This is the way of Christmas joy.

As we fall to our knees before the newborn babe of Bethlehem, let us thank him for all the people and all the gifts in our lives. His outstretched arms welcome us, always, into the embrace of his love. Oh! Come let us adore him!



Together with Kimiko, Maria and Noreen, it is my pleasure to wish you and your families
a very happy and holy Christmas,

Marie

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PENTECOST 2017



Dearest Sisters and Friends,

A very happy feast of Pentecost to you all! May you receive the abundant gifts that the Holy Spirit is freely offering on this great feast.

* *What is inspiring you this Pentecost?*

Throughout the season of Easter, we have been focusing on [what brings us life](#). The events of Pentecost, however, invite us to experience God in new ways. These fresh ways of seeing and experiencing are unexpected and come with the 'rush of a violent wind'. They fill us with new passion that burns 'as of fire'. And they provide us with 'other languages', or alternative ways of communicating, so that we can share this good news with others. Like the vision that sends the pilgrim to a foreign land, these moments of inspiration invite us to begin a new journey, deepening our experience and widening our boundaries, gently moving us towards transformation.

The apostles were there on that first Pentecost, as well as Mary and the 'other women'. The mighty wind of God's Spirit swept through Jesus' followers and filled them with a new joy and a sense of God's presence and power. Peter, who only a few weeks before had 'wept bitterly' after he denied even knowing Jesus, found himself on his feet explaining to a huge crowd that something had happened which had changed the world forever. What God had done for Peter, God was now doing for the whole world: new life and forgiveness, new hope and power, were opening up like spring flowers after a long winter. A new age had begun in which the living God was going to do new things in the world, beginning at that moment

among the people who were listening to Peter. 'This promise is for you', he said, 'and for your children, and for everyone who is far away' (Acts 2:39). God longs to give the Holy Spirit to each of us. All we have to do is ask.



The experience of the wind rushing through the house with a great roar and the fire coming to rest on each person must have been both terrifying and exhilarating. What the Spirit will do within us when he comes will undoubtedly surprise us! We should be prepared for wind and fire but the Spirit often comes softly and secretly, quietly transforming people's lives and situations.

* *How prepared am I to welcome a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit into my life?*

Pentecost day is marked with exuberance, confidence and abundance. Things that seemed impossible begin to happen, and a message that seemed difficult to comprehend or express is widely proclaimed. It is a new beginning. Pentecost is the moment where we enter fully into the mystery and our names are written into the story. Pentecost is our gateway to eternal life.

Let us have no doubt about the generosity of the Spirit who pours out his gifts in abundance to those who are open and who desire them with all their hearts. Also, each one of us has a unique gift through which we serve and build up the community.

* *What is my gift to the community?*

* *What gifts of the Spirit do I most need to build up the christian and wider community?*



As Infant Jesus Sisters and friends, we have come to realise that we are part of a continuing story in which we proclaim with confidence our faith in Jesus Christ. At the same time we recognise that God is already present in the places and people to whom we are sent. Wherever we go, we cross boundaries of culture and language to share boldly and to listen with humility, to give and to receive; to enter into a new relationship by which we may together draw closer to God's transforming love. Together each day we are creating the future we long for by the decisions we make and the actions we take. The Holy Spirit was central to the life of Nicolas Barré. The Holy Spirit is therefore central to the nature and aim of the Institute of the Infant Jesus Sisters, its spirituality and its mission within the Church and the world, *'Relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, our whole life is animated by love, which is for us the source of disinterestedness, humility and availability, freedom and daring.'* (B.I. 1)

The world around us has changed and continues to do so. Over the last fifty years or more we have lived with this constant and rapid change. We have dealt with the shifts in our societies, the church, the world and the universe. Some of us lead the change, others readily embrace it, and of course, some are resistant to it. Absolute clarity is no longer there in our relationship with the church, theology, ecclesiology or cosmology. Everything is changing. What we can often lose is the gift of seeing the innovation and creativity within the change. *Can I allow the Spirit to breathe change and newness into my life? How is the Holy Spirit asking us to respond in our rapidly changing world, where destructive and frightening things sometimes happen, but which is always beautiful and full of wonder?*

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How is the Holy Spirit asking us to respond in our rapidly changing world, where destructive and frightening things sometimes happen, but which is always beautiful and full of wonder?

At Pentecost, the disciples received the Holy Spirit and were emboldened to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to others. Let us pray for the courage to share our story with others and for the humility to listen to the stories that others have to tell.

Wherever we are today, whatever is happening in our lives, the Spirit is with us. Inspired by the Holy Spirit's action, we receive the courage to lift our hearts in hope and the Spirit fills us, making us new.

Today let us invite God's Spirit into our hearts. Filled with that Spirit, may we each make our contribution to the community to which we belong. And, as a community, may we give clear and unmistakable witness to the Truth and Love of God, revealed to us in Jesus our Lord.

Kimiko, Maria, Noreen and I wish you, your families and friends the love, peace and gentleness that the Spirit offers as well as the courage and daring to go forth on God's mission. May the Holy Spirit be with you all!

Maie



Sr Marie's Christmas Letter 2016

Christmas 2016

Dearest Sisters and Friends,

Now that the Year of Mercy has come to an end and the Holy Doors have been closed, we are encouraged by the Christmas story to keep our minds and hearts open to the gift of mercy that the Lord seeks to give us. Having received his mercy, we can then open our hearts to others.

With Pope Francis we have celebrated an intense Jubilee Year in which we have received the grace of mercy in abundance. *"Like a gusting but wholesome wind, the Lord's goodness and mercy have been poured out upon the entire world. Because each of us has experienced at length this loving gaze of God, we cannot remain unaffected, for it changes our lives."* (Misericordia et Misera 4 – Pope Francis' letter at the end of the Year of Mercy).



The image on our Christmas card this year invites us to delight in God's creation and the interconnectedness of all that exists. Mary introduces the infant Jesus to the wonders of the universe and creation itself. Jesus reaches out to embrace the whole of creation in both its wonder and its simplicity. The marguerite daisy, symbol of simplicity, is very familiar to us, members and friends of the Institute, and reminds us of the motto on the blazon, which is still used in many of our schools throughout the world, *"Simple in virtue, steadfast in duty."*

Relationships, openness and dialogue are at the centre of Christmas and close to the heart of Pope Francis. *"Dialogue, dialogue, dialogue"*, he urges us. Dialogue is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say. However difficult things have become in the realm of human life and relationships, we believe that they can change. The Messiah, saviour of the people, has come. Through this child wisdom and understanding, guidance and courage, discernment and holiness, will spill out over all creation, leading to peace and reconciliation. Natural enemies will seek each other out to form a peaceful and rich companionship. All of creation, including not just humanity, but also the world of animals, insects and plants, will exist in harmonious fruitfulness.

all creation, leading to peace and reconciliation. Natural enemies will seek each other out to form a peaceful and rich companionship. All of creation, including not just humanity, but also the world of animals, insects and plants, will exist in harmonious fruitfulness.

A recent image on the news was of a family: man, woman and children, with their donkey and cart, making their way out of Syria – a reminder of Joseph leading the donkey with Mary and Jesus. In recent years the number of people on the move from war and want has increased dramatically.

They walk with very little sense of where they are going, unsure of the welcome they will receive. In many of our countries, especially in Europe, people arrive on our shores seeking a better life. Like all immigrants they are on a journey of hope. They challenge us as individuals and as a society to match the hope in their eyes, a hope similar to that in the eyes of Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus all those years ago. If we really want to be a welcoming community, we must always ask the question, *"Who is being excluded?"*

Christmas is the dawning of a new age, a new hope that began with a fragile and vulnerable infant born in a stable amidst poverty, death, and darkness. This child was determined to be born, this God was committed to come among us, even and especially to the darkest, most crowded, miserable and unwanted places. This is where Jesus was born, small, vulnerable, but filled with life to light the world. When have I seen new hope appear from a most unexpected place?

It is at the crib that we meet the tiny, fragile child, the Prince of Peace, who comes into a world that is torn apart by violence, fear and mutual suspicion.



Let us come before the crib in our vulnerability, humanness and inner stillness. The outward silence of Christmas night invites us to make silence within us. It is only when we uncover the quiet space within our hearts that we will experience something of the tenderness of God. Let us go into the inner room of our hearts. We may feel drained and tired from the cares and worries in our lives, from the unending violence in our world or because of the seeming hopelessness of the situation of the thousands of migrants who continue on their journeys towards a better life. Yet we believe in God's love and tenderness and his promise to be with us always. Thus, in faith, we welcome this child, Emmanuel, God with us.

The invitation of Christmas is that the Lord, in coming to us, wants above all to draw us to himself. He loves each of us, our hidden selves, more than we can ever know. In his sight we are beautiful. We may not think so, but he sees us with clear eyes. He sees deep into the soul given to each one of us by his heavenly Father and which is beautiful beyond measure.

Do I see each person, including myself, as God does?

Christmas brings us all back to the crib of life to begin again, aware of what has gone before, conscious that nothing can last, but full of hope that this time we can learn what it takes to live well and grow towards fullness of life. As we gaze at the crib we see the embodiment of God's loving humility, coming to us in poverty so that we may not be overwhelmed by God's majesty but drawn to God's love.

There is a child in each of us waiting to be born again. It is to those looking for life that the Christ-child beckons.

Christmas is not only for children. It is for those who refuse to give up and grow old, for those to whom life comes anew and with purpose each and every day, for those who can let



go of yesterday so that today and tomorrow can always be full of new possibility. It is for those who live with joy and vitality whatever their age. Christmas is a never-ending feast, a celebration of change, a call to begin once more the journey to human joy and fulfilment.

What is the message of Christmas for me this year?

May the blessings of the Christmas season come to all of us and especially to those who have least among us. May the bells ring out and remind us, when we look at the crib, that Christ is born in everyone's heart, especially in those who feel excluded from society, the dispossessed and the lonely.

How can I reach out to those in need in my particular circumstances?

Let us open our hearts to Emmanuel, God with us, and respond to his invitation. Allow the life of our souls to breathe with a fresh grace that comes with forgiveness and repentance, a grace that enables us to go forward with new heart, new hope and new love.

Kimiko, Maria, Noreen and I send you every good wish for a happy and holy Christmas,

Sr Marie



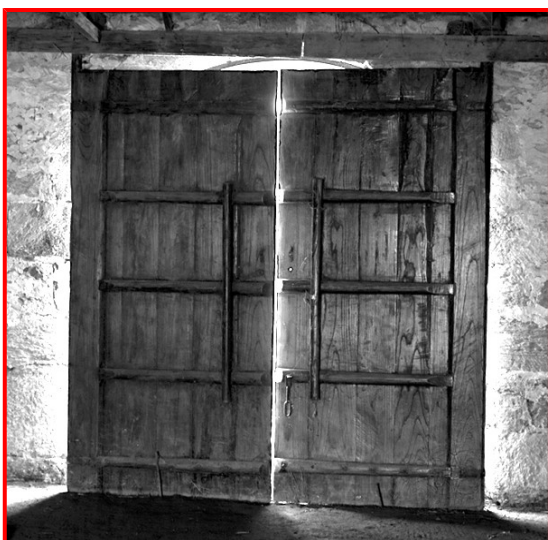
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Pentecost 2016

Dearest Sisters and Friends,

May the Holy Spirit bring new life and energy to you all on this feast of Pentecost! Once again we have the opportunity to be united across the world in our different nations, with diverse cultures and languages, as we reflect on the amazing gift of God's Spirit in our lives. Pentecost is a time for opening doors and allowing the breath of the Spirit to breathe through every aspect of our lives and mission.

For the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis called for every cathedral to have a special door, a 'Holy Door', representing the passage to salvation and to a new and eternal life that was opened by Jesus for all of humanity. It symbolizes an entry to God's mercy - the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet people. Mercy is "the bridge that connects God and humanity, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness." (MV 2)



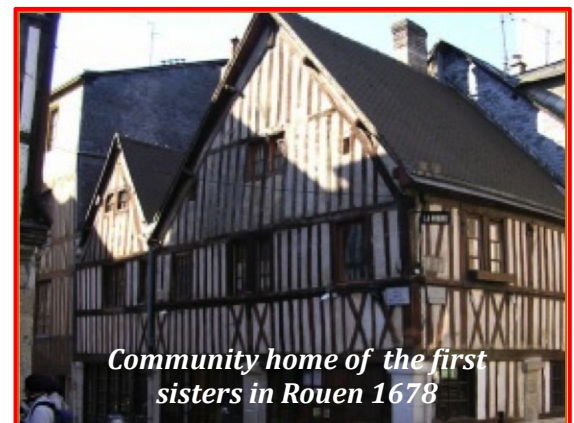
In the Gospel for Pentecost Sunday (John 20:19-23), we read that "the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were." When Jesus appeared to his disciples on the evening of his resurrection from the dead, he found them gathered behind closed doors, full of anxiety and fear. They were in hiding and wanted to be protected from what lay outside the doors; but Jesus ignored the closed doors and came in to stand among them. His first words were 'Peace be with you.'

Doors allow for privacy as well as welcome. At times it is appropriate that our doors keep people out and at other times we open them to offer hospitality and welcome people in. Doors can create places of confinement or places of sanctuary. They can speak of welcome and safety. They can also speak of imprisonment and fear. For the disciples the doors were closed because of their absolute fear.

Jesus walked through the closed door and gave the disciples the mission to offer God's mercy to the world. Their mission was to be the same as his: they were to continue doing what he did. During this year of Mercy Pope Francis invites us not only to walk through a Holy Door into a church but also to walk out of the church to continue the mission of offering God's mercy to others.

Are we ready to walk out of the church and show God's mercy to others?

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Nicolas Barré invited our first sisters to open their doors to one another, which led to the first community in the Institute. He relied very much on the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit as the source of the life and mission of the first sisters. He wanted the Holy Spirit to 'take possession' of this small community so that the sisters would always be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Three hundred and fifty years later, who could have imagined how this first community would have grown and evolved into the Institute we know today! It has been and continues to be the work of the Holy Spirit. At this time in our history we are more conscious than ever of being one community in the Institute, trusting in divine providence and in the love and support we receive from and give to one another.



The Institute is a community that continues to hold its doors open to others – friends, colleagues and those who are drawn to its spirit and who wish to share all or part of its life and mission.

At Pentecost Jesus filled the disciples with new life, making them into a new creation and giving them the life of his Spirit. God has formed us into a community in the Church and in the Institute, into instruments for bringing life and love to our world. But what makes the Church and the Institute more than just a gathering of good people is God’s “breath” infusing us with the music of divinity. The feast of Pentecost celebrates that unseen, immeasurable presence of God in our lives –

- the *spirit* that animates us to do the work of Gospel justice and mercy,
- the *spirit* that makes God’s will our will,
- the *spirit* of God living in us and transforming us so that we might bring life and love to our broken world.

God “breathes” the Spirit into our souls that we may live in love; God ignites the “fire” of the Spirit within our hearts and minds that we may seek God in all things in order to participate fully in the coming of God’s reign.

The disciples, who had been terrified, were filled with joy when Jesus stood among them on that first Pentecost evening. He then gave them their mission, “*As the Father sent me, so am I sending you*” (Jn 20:21). The presence of Jesus in our lives is always accompanied by peace and joy.

We also radiate our spirit of mission through peace and joy. By our word and example we invite others to share it. The gifts of the Spirit are not just for ourselves: they are to be shared. After the coming of the Holy Spirit the disciples did not stay in the room luxuriating in what they had been given. They threw open the doors and went out to tell the world how much God loves everyone and how he wants everyone to experience that love.



The Holy Spirit impels us to open our doors and go forth to proclaim and bear witness to the good news of the Gospel, to communicate the joy of faith and the encounter with Christ, who is the ‘face of God’s mercy’. The Holy Spirit makes us look to the horizon and draws us to the fringes of humanity in order to proclaim life in Jesus Christ.

How many doors will you pass through today? Or maybe you wish to welcome someone in; perhaps you long for a closed door to be opened. May the Holy Spirit open the closed doors in our lives. In a world where there is so much fear and anxiety, so much avoidance and separation, may the open doors of our daily lives speak clearly of the peace of Christ.

Kimiko, Maria and Noreen join me in wishing you renewed energy, joy and zeal on this feast of Pentecost.

With love and peace to you all,

Marie

