

*Christmas 2015*

*Welcome to this Place*

Welcome! If this is your first time at St. Mary's, welcome! If you come to St. Mary's from time to time, welcome! If you worship with us regularly, welcome! Everyone is welcome this evening/today. Nobody is excluded from our community this evening/today. For this is *your* spiritual home. This is *your* place of worship.

How could it be otherwise? For on this night/day we celebrate the mystery of God's love. On this night/day we proclaim God so loved the world that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, not to condemn but to save the world. How could it be otherwise? On this night/day we celebrate the birth of the savior, the eternal Son of God, the one in whom the Word became flesh. Yes, because God so loved us we ought to love and welcome each other. Because God so loved the world, you are welcome here today and every day.

*God* proved his love for us by sending his only begotten Son into the world when we were sinners. *Christ* proved God's love for us by dying on the cross for our sins. *The Holy Spirit* proves God's love for us by dwelling in our hearts, making us living temples of the living God.

There is no one excluded from God's love and forgiveness; there is no one beyond the reach of God's mercy; there is no one who stands outside the circle of God's embrace. That is why you are welcome here today; that is why all are welcome in this

place, especially during this Jubilee Year of Mercy that by Pope Francis proclaimed earlier this month.

Saint Paul assures us that the kindness and generous love of God appeared on this day, not because of any good deeds we had done but, because of God's mercy and love for us. In God's great mercy, St. Paul writes, God poured the gift of the Holy Spirit upon us so that we might inherit eternal life. So you see, there is no limit to God's mercy, *provided* we embrace God's mercy. There is no limit to God's mercy, *provided* we seek that mercy. There is no limit to God's mercy, *provided* we ask for the grace of pardon and forgiveness. That is why all are welcome here today. That is why no one is excluded from God's love this Christmas day or any other.

If you are lonely today because you are without family and friends, embrace the love God extends to you today. If you are alienated from God and others today, receive the love God extends to you today. If you are wondering why you are here and are uncomfortable that you are here, know you are welcome in our community because God loves you.

There is nothing more glorious than the gift of Christmas; for on this day God shares his own life with us. On this day, God gives us the gift of life in his Son, Jesus Christ. May the joy of this day fill you with hope and trust in God who is ever merciful. May the gift of this Christmas Day transform you today and forever.

I am grateful you are here in this place where you are always welcome and will always find a home. To each of you, I wish a most holy and blessed Christmas.