

FESTIVALS IN NOVEMBER 2005

DIWALI (Hindu Festival – 1st Nov 05)

Diwali (or Deepavali) is a spectacular Religious festival. It is held in late Autumn, and on the evenings during this time, the windows of houses are illuminated by lamps and candles. From a distance and in the darkness, these hundreds of glowing lights are a wonderful sight. The word Diwali is a shortened version of Deepavali, which means, "cluster of lights". The festival of lights is a universal Hindu festival.

Diwali symbolises the victory of light over darkness. Celebrated joyously all over the world, it is also a festival of wealth and prosperity.

In India, Diwali is seen as a renewal of life. On this day old lamps are thrown out and new lamps are bought. New lamps are thought to help the souls of the dead find their way to heaven.

The festival also commemorates the coronation of Prince Rama. When Rama arrived at the end of 14 years of banishment, Hindus rejoice because Rama had conquered Ravana. He has conquered evil and good has triumphed. People show their happiness and joy by lighting lamps in praise of Rama.

Hindus believe that the souls of ancestors come to visit their homes on the new moon day of Diwali. Lamps are lit to guide the departed souls on their way.

It is interesting to note that Diwali almost coincides with Halloween, which takes place on 31 October, and that Halloween in Europe is also traditionally associated with spirits and the dead. Diwali is also associated with Lakshmi Mata, the Goddess of wealth. It is the day when Lakshmi is supposed to have emerged from the milky ocean to bring prosperity to the world.

Shopkeepers usually close their accounts at this time. They place their ledgers in front of a picture of Lakshmi Mata and pray for better profits in the coming year. Lakshmi is believed to visit homes that are well lit, so families decorate their homes with flowers and paper chains. The streets are hung with garlands of flowers and are full of lights. People wear their best clothes or buy new ones; children are given presents and New Year greetings are exchanged through visits or Diwali cards. Everywhere is clean and shiny for Hindus believe in the cleanliness of body, mind and home. A Rangoli design is created on doorsteps to welcome everybody. Translated, Rangoli means a pattern in Colour. Traditionally rice flour was used as an offering to the insects, birds and small creatures. Today powder paints, chalk, sand, cereals, seeds or flowers are used to create a Rangoli pattern. Delicious food and sweets are prepared. Traditionally Hindus would visit the temple before eating, making merry and visiting friends and relatives. Sometimes friends are met at the temple where there is Devotional music, singing and dancing as well as plenty of food.

Excerpts from Swami's Divine Discourses

Deepavali means "the array of lights". Its inner significance is to lead man from darkness to light. "Lead me from darkness to light (Thamaso maa jyotir gamaya)" is an Upanishadic prayer: This means that where there is darkness, light is needed. What is this darkness? Sorrow is one form of darkness.

Peacelessness is another. Loss is another. Disappointment is one form of darkness. Misery is yet another. Lack of enthusiasm is another. All these are different forms of darkness. To get rid of the darkness of sorrow, you have to light the lamp of happiness. To dispel the darkness of disease, you have to install the light of health. To get over the darkness of losses and failures, you have to usher in the light of prosperity.

The Deepavali festival is designed to celebrate the suppression of the ego by the higher self. Man is plunged in the darkness of ignorance and has lost the power of discrimination between the permanent and the evanescent. When the darkness of ignorance caused by the ego feeling (Ahamkara) is dispelled by the light of divine knowledge, the effulgence of the Divine is experienced. Deepavali is also the day on which Emperor Vikramaditya ascended the throne.

If the darkness of ignorance is to be dispelled, man needs a container, oil, wick, and a matchbox corresponding to what an external lamp needs. For man, the heart is the container. The mind is the wick. Love is the oil and sacrifice (Vairaagya) is the matchbox. When you have these four, the divine flame of Sri Sathya Sai Organisation, UK

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the Spirit (Aathma-jyothi) shines effulgently. When the light of the Spirit is aflame, the light of knowledge appears and dispels the darkness of ignorance.

The flame of a lamp has two qualities. One is to banish darkness. The other is a continuous upward movement. Even when a lamp is kept in a pit, the flame moves upward. Therefore, the sages have adored the lamp of wisdom as the flame that leads men to higher states. Hence, the effulgence of light should not be treated as a trivial phenomenon. Along with lighting the external lamps, men should strive to light the lamps within them. The human estate should be governed by sacred qualities. This calls for the triple purity of body, mind and speech --the purity of the three instruments (Thrikarana Suddhi).

Deepavali means a garland or festoon of lights, the most characteristic way in which the festival is observed by all. Deepavali is the day when old clothes are discarded and new ones worn; when the home and its precincts are swept clean, given a new look and made to appear fresh and fine. But even while doing all this, attention has to be paid to the discarding of worn out prejudices, the adoption of new habits of love and mutual respect, the freshening of one's attitude towards one's kith and kin, brothers and sisters of all creeds and castes, the hanging of festoons of friendship and fraternity over the door sill of the heart. This will make the festival really meaningful and fruitful.

Deepavali is also a day dedicated to the goodness of riches called Dhana Lakshmi. They celebrate the day as Dhana Lakshmi Pooja in many states in India. But, riches when one comes by them, have to be revered as something given on trust and must be used for the amelioration of the wants of society and not for personal aggrandizement. Riches may come or riches may go; scholarship may be acquired or may not be acquired; even joy may come and go. Whatever happens, man must be unmoved; he must not swerve from the path that he has chosen towards the goal.

On this Deepavali day, resolve to light the lamp of Namasmarana and place it at your doorstep, the lips. Feed it with the oil of devotion; have steadiness as the wick. Let the lamp illumine every minute of your life. The splendour of the Name will drive away darkness from outside you as well as from inside you. You will spread joy and peace among all who come near you.

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All Saints Day (Christian – 1st Nov 05)

The Christian holiday of All Saint's Day honours and recognizes all of the saints of the Christian church, many of which were martyrs. The church sets this day aside to celebrate over 10,000 recognized saints. Historically, All Saints Day was known as Hallomas.

Did you know? All Saints Day is the Church's Memorial Day, a time to remember those who have died in the faith of Christ. It is traditionally celebrated on November 1, but may be observed on the first Sunday in November instead.

The dominical cycle included all Sundays and other days of the year which celebrated and recalled the major events in the life of our Lord (hence "dominical"). The sanctorum cycle emerged as the Church sought to remember the witness of particular saints, especially martyrs, on the day of their death (their heavenly birthday). Gradually, however, the popularity of saints days tended to crowd out the days of the dominical cycle as the number of saints to be remembered grew. By the time of the Reformation only the most major of the days in the dominical cycle were not displaced by one of the saints, and so the reaction was to get rid of saints days altogether. Four hundred years later there is a growing appreciation of the witness of the saints and the appropriateness of remembering them on certain days.

The colour white is appropriate for today, as is the celebration of Holy Communion. This can also be an opportunity to explore in the sermon the meaning of the credal term "the communion of saints" in relation to the words of the eucharistic preface, "with . . . all the company of heaven we praise your name. . . ." The names of those who have died since the previous All Saints service may be read and remembered as part of the service.

Besides, there is no occupation that does not have a patron saint assigned to it. The fact that these heroes are not very different from us encourages us to emulate them, and with so many to choose from, it is easy to find one or more whose lives mirror our own. Far from living perfect lives, saints have faults and foibles like us so that we can identify with them. They are different because they excel in responding to God's grace. As in other ordinary human relations we unaccountably prefer certain saints to others.

No saint is omitted during this feast. We celebrate all these merry inhabitants of heaven whether or not they are on the Church's canonical list. This coming year, incidentally, marks the thousandth year of the Church's practice of declaring saints "canonized". Previously, lists of saints were quite tenuous. The formal canonization process started in the year 993 when Pope John XV declared Saint Ulrich of Augsburg a "Saint of the Universal Church."

The fact that throughout history saints have inspired men and women to face life with courage, hope and equanimity was not lost on Shakespeare as he composed that moving speech of Henry V on St. Crispin's day (Crispin was the patron of shoemakers). Reading lives of saints inspired St Ignatius Loyola to set out on his spiritual journey which resulted in the Jesuit Order. By the way, some think that the term "Jesuit saint" is an oxymoron, but actually there are 41 Jesuit saints and some 285 more on the way to sainthood. A cursory study of a map of the United States illustrates how compelling devotion to saints was to the early explorers. Most settlements and cities were named after some patron saint during the pioneer days of the Franciscan missions, and especially of the less affluent Jesuit missions.

As for saints being a distraction, God gives no indication that he feels threatened by our devotion to saints. On the contrary He uses them to show us the Way. For many who do not feel comfortable approaching an ineffable God, our saints demonstrate that reaching God is neither impossible nor even very difficult. Far from being an anachronism they might be called the user friendly way to reach God.

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EID - UL- FITR (Muslim Festival 3rd Nov 05)

This is also known as the Festival of Fast Breaking.

When the fast ends at the end of Ramadan, it is celebrated for three days in a festival called Eid-ul-Fitr. It falls on the first day of **Shawaal**, the tenth month of the Muslim year, following the month of Ramadan in which the Quran was revealed and which is the month of fasting. In this year 2001, it will take place on the **17th of December**. Eid ul-Fitr is one of the two most important Islamic celebrations. The other, Eid of Sacrifice (**Eid-ul-Adha**) is in remembrance of the sacrifice to have been made by Prophet Abraham of his son and occurs after the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca.

The festival Eid-ul-Fitr gives prominence to fulfilling the aspirations of the poor and needy. Affluent and faithful Muslims, who understand the pangs of hunger and consider the feelings of the poor through Ramadan fasting, visit the needy and assist them with food, clothing and cash. Islam orders every Muslim with means to give at least two full measures of rice as '**Sadaqathul Fitr**' before going out for festival prayers the following morning. This frees the poor of the necessity of going around (looking for alms) on this day and helps them to feel rich.

Soon after the Eid prayers, the Muslims go to the burial grounds to invoke the mercy of Allah and his forgiveness for the dead. This visit is to remind one that on no occasion should our mind be immersed in fun and frolic, thus neglecting the remembrance of Allah and life after death.

At Eid- ul-Fitr people dress in their finest clothes, adorn their homes with lights and decorations, give treats to children, and enjoy visits with friends and family. Friends and family gather to pray in congregation and for large meals. Women especially (particularly mothers, wives, sisters and daughters) are normally given special gifts by their loved ones.

A sense of generosity and gratitude colours these festivities. Although charity and good deeds are always important in Islam, they have special significance at the end of Ramadan. As the month draws to a close, Muslims are obligated to share their blessings by feeding the poor and making contributions to mosques. In some cities fairs are held to celebrate the end of the Fast of Ramadan.

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Akhand Bhajans (Sai Event – 12th & 13th Nov 05)

“Akhand Bhajan” simply means devotional singing done over 24 hours, without a break. It begins at 6:30 on the evening of one day and closes at 6:30 on the evening of the next day. Akhand-Bhajan must be as continuous as breathing itself if it is to deserve its name.

The vibrations of the sacred sounds, which arise from the Bhajan singing, have a mystic energy that draws the omnipresent Divine to the devotees whose heartstrings vocalise it. The name has the power to redress, cure and save. Chanting the glory of God is the royal path of self-realisation. When all the devotees sing the Bhajans in one voice, the Divine Vibrations pervade all through in the surroundings and electrify them. Baba says that in the *Kali* Age there is no greater spiritual practice than chanting the name of the Lord. Let one remember the name of Rama at the time of passing, whether he is a millionaire or a pauper, whether he is a scholar or an illiterate. Sing the name of the Lord and redeem your lives! *Bhajans* are therefore supremely valuable.

HOW DID IT BEGIN?

On the 23rd of November 1975, people from all parts of the world had assembled in Puttaparthi to celebrate the Golden Jubilee, and office-bearers of the centres were there for the Second World Conference and other functions that took place. Later they expressed their desire to Baba that they be allotted a date, before the close of the Jubilee Year, when they in their own places could celebrate the happy occasion. In order to overcome their disappointment it was decided that, in all centres all over the world, *Nama Samkirtan* (singing the glory of God's name) would be held for a full twenty-four hours, beginning at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday and ending at 6:30 p.m. on Sunday. Around the globe, 42 countries and more than 7000 centres enthusiastically took up this pleasant assignment. Since then, Akhand Bhajans have been conducted every year, for 24 hours, on the second Saturday / Sunday in November, at a Global level at all Sathya Sai Centres, for conferring Peace, Harmony and Bliss to all of mankind.

Some excerpts from Baba's Divine Discourses:

*If you sing alone in your shrine, the vibrations return to you as reaction. But in community singing, what you have is not a reaction but a wave of vibrations. They enter into the atmosphere and purify the polluted air. The atmosphere today is polluted by bad thoughts and feelings. When you sing the glory of God, the bad germs in the air are destroyed, and the air gets purified by a treatment with antibiotics, as it were. Community bhajans should not be treated as a pastime. When thousands of persons join in singing bhajans, they should be fully absorbed in the devotional process and the ecstasy of that experience. The singing should be vibrant and soulful and not mechanical or drawling and uninspiring. It should combine **Bhava** (feeling), **raga** (melody) and **taala** (rhythm). What delight can be experienced when all sing in chorus, with the same feeling, in the same tune and to the same timing! When there is such unity the Divine can be experienced.*

Not all realise the potency and efficacy of reciting the Lord's name. The first requisite is purity of thought, word and deed. The name that is uttered by the tongue should be meditated upon by the mind. What is uttered and dwelt upon; should be hailed by clapping of the hands. This threefold concentration on the Divine name, unity of mind, speech and action; purifies the heart and nourishes the feeling of devotion. When the chanting of the Name is done in community singing, it should be in a form in which the entire group can participate easily. The tune, the rhythm, etc. should be such that all can follow the Bhajan. If the lead singer takes up a song that is not familiar to others, the response from the group will be poor. There will be no enthusiasm or genuine participation. Their minds will be distracted. When all the devotees participate in the Bhajan, the vibrations that are produced will generate joy and harmony.

COMMUNITY SINGING OF BHAJANS

When the chanting of the Name is done in community singing, it should be in a form in which the entire group can participate easily. The tune, the rhythm, and so on, should be such that all can follow the *Bhajan*. If the lead singer takes up a song that is not familiar to others, the response from the group will be poor. There will be no enthusiasm or genuine participation. Their minds will be distracted. When all the devotees participate in the *Bhajan*, the vibrations that are produced will generate joy and harmony.

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There are some rules to be observed in conducting community *bhajans*. *Alapana* (elaboration of a *raga*) may be done in *Keerthana* (individual singing), but it is wholly out of place in community *bhajans*. Hence, in such *bhajans* the accent should be entirely on the Name.

Many who organise mass singing on special occasions are not aware what kind of *bhajans* should be sung then. A person who has an individual style of his own may sing as he likes in private, but he is not suitable for community singing.

Kirtan is "singing aloud the Glory of God." ***Samkirtan*** is the process of singing, which originates in the heart, not from the lips or tongue. It is the expression of the joyous thrill that wells up from the heart when the Glory of God is remembered. It is the spontaneous manifestation of inner ecstasy. No attention is paid to the blame or praise that others may give. It does not seek the admiration or the appreciation of the listeners. It is sung for one's own joy, one's own satisfaction, and one's own delight. *Kirtan* of this supreme type alone deserves the name *Samkirtan*.

Singing this intense yearning for God and enjoying the experience of adoring Him helps to purify the atmosphere. Man is today forced to breathe the air polluted by sounds that denote violence, hatred, cruelty, and wickedness. Therefore, he is fast losing the high attainments that are in store for him. The vibrations resulting from singing the glory of God can cleanse the atmosphere and render it pure, calm, and ennobling. It is with this high purpose in view that this program of global *Samkirtan* was designed."

Divine Discourse: 14th November 1976

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Ladies Day (Sai Event 19th Nov 05)

During the Birthday Celebrations and 6th World Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Organisation, held in Prashanti Nilayam in November 1995, Swami for the first time declared November 19th as Ladies Day. On this day Swami also spoke about the inner significance of this day and why women should be honoured. Swami says, "One refers to one's own country as motherland, but not a fatherland. The culture of Bharat has given utmost importance to the mother.

On Ladies Day, Women of all races, religions and cultures are honoured for their loyal duty as a mother. One reason why Swami declared November 19th to be Ladies Day is because we take their roles for granted and we need this day to honour them. Unlike a typical Mother's Day, where mothers are just thanked for a wonderful job, Ladies Day is meant to look deeper into their role and recognize their outstanding contribution to humanity and appreciate what they have done in this world.

Ladies Day is celebrated at the Sai Centres by all, in the full spirit of the occasion. The Ladies are given the exclusive opportunity to conduct for themselves the Centre program for one day. They do a full Bhajan session, discourse and many things by themselves. This shows the real necessity for women in our society and shows that when they do things it is done with a lot of love.

Some excerpts from Baba's Divine Discourses:

Today, the 19th November is celebrated as Ladies Day only to remind you of the importance of mother. You should conduct yourself according to the wishes of your mother. Do not disobey her. Chaitanya, the great devotee of Lord Krishna, married Lakshmi on the insistence of his mother, though he was not in favour of marriage. But as fate would have it, Lakshmi passed away soon after the marriage. His mother Sachidevi felt very sad for having got him married against his wishes. Chaitanya told her, "This is what happens when one goes against the dictates of one's conscience." So, if you feel what you are doing is correct, then try to convince your mother, but never hurt her feelings.

There is nothing greater than mother's love. Mother's words are always sweet. At times she may use harsh words, but they are meant only to correct you, not to hurt you. There may be a wicked son, but there can never be a wicked mother in this world. Today is declared as mother's day only to make you understand the value of mother's love and her concern for you. Among mother, father, teacher and God, mother is given the topmost priority. The modern youth do not care for the mother. They think they are highly educated and that the mother does not know anything. It is a great mistake to think so. Never look down upon the mother. Even the mother should not compel her children to accede to her wishes. Through love and sincerity she should put the children on the proper path. She should aspire that her children be good, they need not be great.

One refers to one's own country as motherland, but not fatherland. The culture of Bharat has given utmost importance to the mother. Lord Rama declared: "Janani Janma Bhoomishchcha Swargadapi Greheyaasi" mother and the motherland are greater than even heaven. Country is the mother and the culture, the father. Never forget your country and its culture. Since ancient times, the culture of Bharat has been propagating the message of peace and love with the motto, Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavantu (may all the world be happy!) You have to uphold this sacred culture.

Divine Discourse: 19th November 1999

This Bharat is the land of sanctity and chastity, which has given birth to such great women of exceptional character, who lent glory to Bharat as a nation of heroic women.

From ancient times, the presiding deity of Gayathri Mantra, Gayathri Devi, has been worshipped as the Mother of the Vedas, which are held as the most ancient and authoritative scriptures of wisdom. Gayathri Mantra originated in this holy land. The glory of this Mantra has spread all over the world. The people of Bharat have worshipped Gayathri in several ways and have redeemed their lives. Gayathri has been

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worshipped in four forms: (1) Sathyavathi (2) Angavathi (3) Anyavathi (4) Nidhanavathi. All the four are equally sacred, and elicit limitless grace of the Divine. The world is symbolized by these four forms of Gayatri. That is why it is described as Nature (Prakriti), a female form (Sthree). We refer to our native country as motherland.

The woman at home has been held in high esteem as 'Grihalakshmi', the goddess of prosperity of the home. When her husband faces difficulties, the wife readily shares the burden and is prepared to do anything, undergo any suffering or even sacrifice her life for the welfare of her husband and the family. It is the woman of the home who is behind the good reputation of the home. The woman is the embodiment of sacrifice. Though the male counterpart may also do sacrifice, it will be with selfish tinge while woman's sacrifice is absolutely selfless. Therefore, we should be proud of our women.

Women devotees in Sai Movement are participating in large numbers enthusiastically in service activities such as helping the women of weaker sections to learn some useful trades like tailoring etc. so that they can earn some money for the family and also spend their time usefully. If such activities are taken up all over the country, the country will prosper. This sacred work is typical of the culture of our ancient country. Women are the heirs of our ancient culture. Culture means refinement. Women are the torchbearers of refinement and they are toiling for the emancipation of the nation.

In order to teach the subtleties of the scriptural texts, and encourage women to play their role in society, 19th is fixed as Mahila Day. Dharma can be made to occupy its position in society and restored to its pristine glory only by women.

Divine Discourse: 19th April 1998

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Guru Nanak's Birthday (Sikh Festival 26th Nov 05)

Gurpurbs are Sikh festivals which celebrate the lives of these Gurus. Guru Nanak was born in 1469 in what is now Pakistan. At the age of 30 he mysteriously disappeared for 3 days. When he reappeared, he began to preach the Sikh faith and spent the rest of his life teaching, writing and travelling around the world to discuss religion with Muslims and Hindus.

Sikhs celebrate Guru Nanak's Birthday and the other *Gurpurbs* with an *Akhand Path*, a reading of the Sikh holy scriptures, the [Guru Granth Sahib](#), continuously from beginning to end. This is done by a team of Sikh men and women, each reading for 2-3 hours over 48 hours, beginning two days before and ending early on the morning of the birthday.

On the day before the birthday, processions are held in India and in some parts of England. These are led by five people representing the original [Pani Piare](#) (Five Beloved Ones) and followed by singers, musicians and even teams of people demonstrating martial arts.

The Gurdwaras (places where Sikhs go to pray) are decorated with flowers, flags and posters depicting various aspects of Sikhism. They may also be illuminated. Sikhs join together to sing, pray and eat together. On the morning of the anniversary celebrations begin early, at around 4 or 5am, with *keertan* (musical recitation of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib) and *katha* (lectures on Sikhism). These celebrations go on until around 1 or 2pm.

After this, *Karah Parasaad* will be served. This is a sweet-tasting food which has been blessed. It is made from semolina or wheat flour, sugar and *ghee* (clarified butter) and is served warm. The congregation will then share a *langar* (meal) from the free kitchen. Celebrations may also include fireworks.

Sometimes the festival extends into the evening, with prayers and hymns continuing long into the night. Sikhs who are unable to visit the Gurdwara during the festival will hold a similar ceremony in their own homes.

Source: www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion

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Advent (Christian 27th Nov – 24th Dec 05)

The word **Advent** means "coming" or "arrival." The focus of the entire season is the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ in his First Advent, and the anticipation of the return of Christ the King in his Second Advent. Thus, Advent is far more than simply marking a 2,000 year old event in history. It is celebrating a truth about God, the revelation of God in Christ whereby all of creation might be reconciled to God. That is a process in which we now participate, and the consummation of which we anticipate. Scripture reading for Advent will reflect this emphasis on the Second Advent, including themes of accountability for faithfulness at His coming, judgment on sin, and the hope of eternal life.

In this double focus on past and future, Advent also symbolizes the spiritual journey of individuals and a congregation, as they affirm that Christ has come, that He is present in the world today, and that He will come again in power. That acknowledgment provides a basis for Kingdom ethics, for holy living arising from a profound sense that we live "between the times" and are called to be faithful stewards of what is entrusted to us as God's people. So, as the church celebrates God's inbreaking into history in the Incarnation, and anticipates a future consummation to that history for which "all creation is groaning awaiting its redemption," it also confesses its own responsibility as a people commissioned to "love the Lord your God with all your heart" and to "love your neighbour as yourself."

Few times are more sacred for a family or household than Christmas. Along with the Advent Season, Christmas time is rich in traditions which, despite modern commercial exploitation, still stir our hearts and imagination. The Christmas tree, the manger scene, the music and carols, the lights shining in the winter darkness joyfully proclaim the birth of Jesus Christ and call us to come and adore him.

Christmas and Advent can be a spiritual feast for those who live these seasons spiritually. And where better to live them spiritually than in our own homes and households? This site's purpose is to help families and households celebrate Advent and Christmas in a Christian way.

Christmas and Advent customs appear everywhere today. True symbols that they are, the living traditions of the season bring peoples and families together and connect us with our ancient faith.

And they respond surprisingly to modern needs as well. The Christmas and Advent seasons uphold so many precious realities presently endangered: birth, children, family, the earth itself. In celebrating Christmas and Advent, keep their message for today in mind.

In a world where nature and our environment are threatened, let us make our Christmas tree and manger scene reminders of the beauty and sacredness of nature. How closely at his coming did Jesus bind himself to the animals of the field, as well as to the earth and the open sky!

Remembering the poor shepherds and the circumstances of Christ's birth, so marked by poverty, let us make them reminders of the forgotten poor of our world.

Let the Child and Joseph and Mary teach us the dignity and importance of children and families in a society so neglectful of them.

The Christmas season's rich traditions come from peoples throughout the world, from Spain, South America, Eastern Europe, and so many other places. Let them remind us of the unity of all people as children of God.