



## **PASTORAL LETTER OF THE BISHOP OF EAST ANGLIA 1<sup>st</sup> JANUARY, 2017 - SOLEMNITY OF THE MOTHER OF GOD**

*To be read at all Masses throughout the Diocese during the weekend of December 31st / January 1<sup>st</sup>*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, dear friends,

Today's celebration, Mary Mother of God, commemorates a decision that was made by the bishops of the Church nearly sixteen hundred years ago when they met together in solemn Council at Ephesus. In order to safeguard the truth that from the very moment of his Incarnation, Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully man, the Council fathers proclaimed that Mary was Theotokos, the Godbearer, the Mother of God. I would like us to make three reflections in this beautiful title given to Mary – *Mother of God*.

First, Mary, Mother of God, speaks to us once again of the great mystery of the Incarnation which we are still celebrating this Christmastime - that– in Jesus Christ, God himself came among us as a man. The holy life in Mary's womb is of someone who actually existed before all time began and who became what he was not for you and for me. This holy life in Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The divine Son of God takes on our human flesh and is born of a human mother. He does so in order that one day we might share in his divine nature.

Jesus Christ is indeed truly God and truly man. Mary is rightly called God-bearer, the Mother of God.

Second, as we reflect on Mary, who gives birth to the Prince of Peace, the One who has made our peace with God, so we recall again the message of the angels to the shepherds at the moment the Saviour is born: *I bring you great joy and peace to men who enjoy his favour*.

On this New Year's Day, pray fervently with the whole Church for the gift of peace for all.

We ask Mary who is the Queen of Peace, to pray with us that peace may become a reality in our time. We unite ourselves in ourselves with her prayer for all who are caught up in the wars and terrorism Across the world – and especially for those in Syria, Iraq and the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East; in Africa, Afghanistan, the Ukraine; for our Christian brothers and sisters who daily face persecution and martyrdom because of their faith in Jesus

Christ; and we remember all those who have suffered recently in terrorist attacks in Europe; for all those places where men and women have no freedom or dignity of life.

Our prayer today must lead to action: first, to support those organisations which are working for peace and amongst those who are displaced from their own countries; second, to be prepared to welcome those refugees and asylum seekers who come to live among us; and last to work for peace and reconciliation in our own communities and families.

Peace is, of course, a gift from God himself. *That* is the peace that we seek for our world – a peace that passes all human understanding. Finally, as we reflect on Mary, who in her Motherhood gives birth to the new dawn of creation, so we reflect on *this* New Year's Day.

So today we come before the Lord our God filled with a deep sense of thanksgiving for all those things which with the help of his grace we have achieved or been blessed with over the past year. Today we place before him all our regrets, our sins and our lost opportunities.

We stand at his altar today with open hearts to be renewed with hope and anticipation. As Mary opened up her life and welcomed God into her womb, thus bring the source of joy and hope into our world, so we too must open the door of our hearts and welcome him, asking him to guide us in all our endeavours. Then, like Mary, we too will become the means of bringing the joy and hope of Jesus Christ into the lives of our brothers and sisters.

I wish you all a very happy New Year!

May it be filled with God's grace, with his hope and with his peace.

With all good wishes and an assurance of my continued prayers for you,  
Yours devotedly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alan S. Hopes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

The Right Revd Alan S Hopes  
Bishop of East Anglia