NOTE: A December Christmas program talk by Bishop Józef Gawlina.

December 19, 1948

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Dear Listeners

 The Feast of Christmas is nearing with large steps. Just a few days and we will be singing the carols. Before Christmas Eve I would like to have the joy of thanking you for you goodness, since I am to be guested by the Rosary Hour. My dear friend, the Very Reverend Father Justin, visiting me in Rome and seeing that I was beset by war troubles – because war is good for young men, but not for an old bishop, who together with them though the heat of war, in mud and freezing weather – and since Fr. Justin was so gracious as to invite me for a cure to America. I am, thanks to doctors, better, and I felt the need to express my heart-felt thanks Fr. Justin as well as his listeners. In the feast of Christmas I will be celebrating a Pontifical Mass in your intention at which I will ask the newly born Savior bless you all, you families, friends and households.

 Advent is a hopeful time. Although Christ was born 1948 years ago in Bethlehem, nevertheless we, in our hearts, yearn for our Savior. It is our soul that goes out to Our Lord Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer.

 Even greater was the yearning of the pagan world before the coming of Jesus Christ. After all, the world was pressed down with the weight of our sins, and in the prophecies of old were foretold, and even before the Flood, that the Savior, the Prince of Peace, the Son of God would be born and would save us and bring justice, lighten the burden of the depressed and rescue the world.

 We know from of history that an Indian prince named Wykramadya sent a message to Rome asking whether and where the new lord of the world was already born. Tacitus, a Roman writer that humanity waited for this great monarch wrote – and in far-away Persia, magi, or wise men for generations had waited among fasting and prayers for the appearance of a star which would ultimately lead them to Bethlehem to the Christ child.

 Old Iranian literature contains a great prophecy of Zaraustra on "Sausyancie" or helper in humanity, which destroys the power of evil and brings justice and order, and it was supposed to occur in the early Christian era. And recently old texts were discovered in Central Asia which repeat the same thing and say that three kings were to receive from the child Jesus a holy fire, the symbol of the Savior of the world.

 So much of the pagan yens. Now let us return to the yen of the Chosen People who knew that the Son of God the Messiah would be of their race. The Old Testament is as Saint Augustine wrote: “piedegagos eis Christon,” – “the teacher of Christ .” All its historical events and prophecies point to the Messiah. Despite the fact that there were many just people in Israel, none of them would reach heaven until they obtained there salvation, but all waited with bated breath. Bring to your imagination all the patriarchs, prophets and just people looking forward with hope for the coming of their Savior. How long was the waiting! And then suddenly the Angel of the Lord comes and announces: “The Savior was born this day in Bethlehem.”

What a great and astounding joy reigned among the just people. Did not the eyes of Adam fill up in tears of joy? “Here come the One who will make sound what I had made wrong. O God, you are faithful and loving, and did not abandon the human race, but wrested it from the hands of the enemy.”

 Abraham, to whom God made the promise that from his descendants will the born the Savior, cried out: “You promised me Lord, that from my descendants all the nations on earth will be blessed – and I await faithfully. My eyes are dim from looking into the future, but today you are preparing you coming.”

 “And I have seen, Jacob the patriarch who could see, “ that the Savior is to be born in these days. In dying, I have told the tribe of Judah, that the crown will not be taken away, until comes the time that He who is to be sent will be the expectation of all peoples. And now the crown was taken from Judah, because in Jerusalem Herod rules. The birth of the Lord and Savior is the joy I am awaiting.”

 And who will write of the joy of David, king and prophet? “From my lineage and from my family! I called him my Lord in a psalm, and behold My Lord and my God was born of a virgin of my lineage.” He must have strummed a new hymn of triumphal joy at experiencing that joy.

 Michael the prophet with glorious light reminds his prophets that in Bethlehem, in the land of Juda will be born the Savior who will govern Israel: “behold, above Bethlehem the heavens open and the angels sing.

God will come Himself and save us” – I cheered up the nation of Israel, said Isaiah – and we have reached our expectation this moment, when the Holy Virgin conceived and gave birth to a son, and his name is Emmanuel, God is with us.

Now our advent is ended, our waiting over. Joy reigns and singing is heard when the word became flesh and dwelt among us. And the voice of angels was heard over Bethlehem; Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.

 In December, 1942, I was going from Bagdad to Bethlehem at the invitation of the Patriarch of Jerusalem to celebrate the midnight mass. In the meantime I was with the Polish army in the west, in Mesopotamia, in the fatherland of the patriarchs. Our camp was spread all over Biblical places and so near Babylon, in Mossul or Ninive, where the prophet Jonah announced penance, near Ur of Chadei, Abraham’s birthplace near the Persian border.

 In the first hours of December 24 I flew from Bagdad. We flew over the plains of Sinaar, when people wanted to build a tower to reach heaven. We passed over the land of Mane, Tekel, Pares, over the nation of God’s spoken word, where Daniel had the vision of the Son of Man to whom the Father gave power, honor and kingdom. His power will be eternal and his Kingdom will never fail.

By moonlight I looked upon the desert beneath. I thought of the words of Isaiah the prophet, looking forward for the coming of the Messiah, “The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like a lily.” “All of creation with great desire awaits the coming of the Son of God.” (Rzym.8, 19) “In hope, that creation itself will be eased from its prison for the greater glory of the sons of God” – as St. Paul says. We know that up until Christ came the whole of creation suffered until His coming as Savior.”

What can more effectively and beautifully describe the bated breath of the condition of an awaited liberator then a desert? It suffers because of the original sin of humanity but it waits in the hope in the Lord and the liberation. Now we flew over Ituraea and Taconites.

The first rays of the sun appeared, as we approached the Sea of Genesret. And so lay before us that lover of the Lord, at the foot of Caperaum with the ruins of the synagogue, where the Savior established the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. There lived that friend-soldier, the Captain and Centurion whose words were admired by the Lord and repeated in the Mass to this day. The sight had some kind of curious, beautiful aura of color. There was some kind of quiet about it and a sweet repose of the Galilean countryside. The colors seemed to be melodic. It all transformed itself into a song. We are flying over Nazareth. I see the towers of the Annunciation. Do the sound of the plane motors, do the bells ring in honor of Him who began here and who was to be again born here for us? In purple heights soars Tabor, the mountain of the Transfiguration. The valleys are shrouded in fog. Next, the plains of Jezreel, and we're in Jaffa. From there, an hour by car to Jerusalem, where we began our visit to our hospital. I cheer up the wounded with a word, a cigarette, a bit of trivia gift.

At twelve, I was in the Patriarch’s palace. The two of us ride to Bethlehem. Before us travelled the Palestinian Cavalry carrying blue and white pennants.

Lit by the rays of the sun, on a beautiful day, the walls of David’s town glowed. “‘But **you**, **Bethlehem**, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of **you** will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. “ (Matt. 2, 6) The streets of Bethlehem are crowded. In windows and even on roofs people stand awaiting their Patriarch. In their midst I see Polish uniforms.

Standing before the church of the Nativity are prelates, canons, Franciscans and armed forces chaplains. Young scouts and Arab servers sing the Te Deum. They have miraculous voices, like the sun, like the sea, like wine.

A solemn celebration with flags for the patriarchy is being held. Then on the throne, a polish bishop appears with soldiers, pilgrims and the displaced. And so, on an alien throne, the pastoral sign of the Patriarchy, the miter - which now I leave at the Polish Museum in Chicago - a gift of Bethlehem manger here, which, especially today, the eyes of the world look upon.

“Dixit Dominus Domino Meo” – the words of the solemn vespers from the messianic psalm, in which David calls the Messiah, his Lord: “The Lord said to my lord.

 Princes sing, and small altar boys smile and point out my army boots, and surely under my purple tunic they had never seen a bishop dressed in similar fashion.

 More and more the psalms break out at church in the sound of the Magnificat. Vespers come to an end and we return to Jerusalem.

 There I took part in three evening vigils. We broke bread, the Christmas wafer and sang carols and thought of far-away Poland; it was still occupied. I drove back to Bethlehem in sight of the full moon. The month spilled over in silver light. I passed by the tomb of Rachel, when I notice a car coming from the opposite direction and bam, I collided with it. My car became a heap of metal. I felt my hand and feet they were all ok. Just a bloody head. How will I get to Bethlehem with my Canon? I stood with my purple clothing with soldier’s gear underneath, holding up countless traffic behind me. They are held up from the Christmas services. “Go ahead, go ahead,” I said. “You can start without me. Ultimately, I got a ride in a truck with military pilots. The men recognized me and invited me to go with them. “Oh, they said, “That’s the Polish bishop, come with us.” And then started our Christmas celebration. “Christus natus est nobis, venite adoremus.” This all began here, in Bethlehem. Here the heavens were bathed in honey; here the choir of Angels sang, here the world witnessed the majesty of God, here the prophecies took place.

 And what will the German leaders say of which the psalmists write, that the came and rebelled against Christ.

 Megalomania and pride stood by the manger through every catastrophe, and this last war.

 But He who lives in the heavens will laugh at them.

 It is a delicate laugh, the laugh of Gd. Against the pride of the dictators, God placed a smile defenseless baby in Bethlehem, Son of God who will rule them with an iron rod, which will bread them to pieces.

 And he who compared himself to God, in his pride said that he would be like a God – “I and my nation and my race,” who thought himself powerful, nevertheless was lost like the wind, like snow, like the winter.

 Listen to the lesson in actuality: “Assur absque ulla causa calumniatus est populum meum.” Assyria without any reason attacked my nation. Yes, they did, because even the Babylonian ways were still somewhat more peaceful – and she attacked us and took us into bondage and dispersed us throughout the world.

 But let us have hope. A Savior was born to us, wondrous counselor, mighty God, Father of the ages and Prince of Peace.

 It is now midnight. Through the throng, press diplomats in gleaming attire. Assisting me were polish clergy, Americans, Anglicans, the French, the Czechs, and even Egyptians. The Queen of Egypt took her place in the choir.

 In deep silence, I begin the pontifical midnight Mass. Of course, I had so much to tell Jesus, particularly since He came down from the Heavens to his Bethlehem – I had so many souls to commend to Him. Blood relatives, soldiers, the displaced, and you my dear good people from America.

 After the midnight mass I took the sleeping Lord and carried it in solemn procession to the manger. I placed him in the place where the words were written: Hic de Maria Virgine Jesus natus est.” Here was born Jesus the son of the Virgin Mary. We sang the Gospel and returned to the church.

 And whom do I see here? The entire church was filled with polish soldiers who came to celebrate the occasion of the Polish midnight Christmas.

 Upon entry I see some sergeant whose hand held a brave young lad. I asked, “And where do you come from?” The little one’s eyes shine. He was from Judea wrote to his Dad, who is a sergeant in Galilee, to meet him in Bethlehem. My Dad fought in Poland and went through Rumania to Syria. He fought near Tobrkuk. Stas however immigrated through Russia and Persia to the Holy Land. He bought mementos for Mom and Sister in Law from near the manger. “And where is your wife?” I asked the sergeant. “God knows!” Perhaps at home with the daughters or perhaps in Siberia. Perhaps they were shipped out to a concentration camp by Hitler.”

 “Would your excellency please bless this rosary?” asked another soldier. “From which camp do you have a passport?” I asked jokingly. The young man looked at me with suspicion, while the Rep from the government was standing nearby. “Bishop, you would not betray me, because as God’s rep you should be good!

 It was shown later that he did not have the documentation. He was from Judea. “The war is coming to an end, he t old himself, and I was still not in Bethlehem; It would be a shame if I didn’t go.” He went without a leave of absence and some car took him top Jerusalem, and since he was very hungry, he sought something to eat. He found out that some polish girls were in Ain Karem – where John the Baptist was born. He ate there. “They were good, these girls, becakuse they gave me some oranges for the road to Bethlehem. But most of all he found his sister in law there who traipsed through all of Russia in search of the Polish army.

 With difficulty I pressed forward through the church and to the altar. The church was packed with soldiers. They even would have sat in the pulpit. Their voices boomed out, “Dzisiaj w Bethlejem,” “Wsród Nocnej Ciszy, “Bóg się rodzi.”

 After Mass I gave a homily and returned to Jerusalem. I saw the shepherd’s fields aglow with lights. Surely there they already lit lamps for the occasion. In the evening I went to Gallilee through Samaria to Juda in order to break the wafer with the soldiers in Kastin but before arrival, our car broke down and we ran into a ditch The bishop, the Vicar General and the chaplain pushed the car.

 At the gates of the camp stood a few men. The guard saluted militarily and added, “Your Excellency, we have been waiting quite a while.”

 “My child, have we see each other before?” “Yes, in Russia, but then, I was still a civilian.” “And you are now soldierized! How old are you?” The young man straight as a string, the entire voice exclaims, "I report dutifully, 17 years old!”

 “No, no, tell Bishop the truth. You just received your first communion. Tell me your real age.

 The youth dropped his eyes downward and replied, “Thirteen.”

 In Russia, had he given his real age, he would not have been accepted. Now he expected to return to Poland as he is.

 Again Carols, greetings, sharing the Christmas wafer, the opłatek.

 We return to Jerusalem at midnight, and I lay down with weariness, and, you wouldn’t believe it, there was a short circuit.

 I thought this must be some Satanic ploy. On Christmas Eve, we had the issue with the car wreck, yesterday, running into a ditch, today, I was ready to be fried.

 For the New Year, I returned to Babylon, and celebrated Epiphany together with our 5-th Regiment over the Persian border in pages where a defeated Parthian arrow apostate Julian snatched the word: "Galilaee viciati."

 Violently, the picture of Scripture, moved before my eyes with the champion of Wisdom, which the Lord had all the time, and playfully created the surface of the earth before the mountains had been set forth and the seas found their place. (Prov. 8, 25-30)

Did you mean: Gdym ***patrzył*** na ***wyrastający*** z ziemi długi rząd maleńkich, do kostek mi sięgających szczytów bazaltowych, równolegl

When I looked at rising from the earth long row of tiny peaks of basalt, which went parallel to the second, fifth, and tenth chains ever higher until the livid rising proudly gave way to bands like the land of giants put together like the titanic harp strings with increasingly powerful mountains, where rain, dew, and hoarfrost covered the land, where heat storms and winds, clouds and lightning, the sun and the moon were playing the song of the Lord of lords.

It was a happy day, when I was driving through the blooming steppe, where on four sides, army regiments were set up from which echoed the songs of our Christmas carols.

An even greater joy awaited us for the evening. When night fell upon us, above us in the midst of the myriad stars the seven stars of the great bear shone brightly, and a group of engineers gathered around a fire. It was a beautiful display; the best I have seen in my life. It was a great service to display at Christmas and the Epiphany.

At the same time, from the Persian border the wondrous night, a fantastic group was a light-filled visage appeared as it came toward the stable to give homage to the Newborn King of the Jews.

Two thousand years ago the three kings came from Persia. See the camels decorated with huge, colorful rugs as they are led by lead their courtiers who are decorative with silver and gold and miters on their heads.\

They near the stable with majestic humility, taking off their head coverings and kissing the ground before the Child and presenting gifts having seen the star that led them to the stable.

From the West – isn’t it a curious sight: mountain men with an orchestra play: “Dzisiaj w Betleem,” “Chrystus się rodzi, nas oswobodzi, Anieli grają króle witają, pasterze śpiewają bydlęta klękają – cuda, cuda ogłaszają.”

 And so too, in this present day, the Poles came forth moved by the love of Christ.

Flood lights bleed into the picture in which East and West, the first year of the twentieth century and the link is at the foot of King of the world, some making their exotic gifts, some offering their hearts, their prayers, incense, and myrrh of the Polish Pilgrims.

My dear listeners, what has happened to these Polish pilgrims? The sergeant gave his life at Monte Casino, Stasiu is in England, Mom with the sisters in Germany – the young soldier is roaming in Scotland and the one who mis-spoke his age entered as a brother to a cloister. From the orchestra, some returned to Poland, the rest seeks help.

They are displaced persons, as were Jesus and His Mother, and Saint Joseph – displaced in Egypt. Even Jesus was born as a displaced person. It is why I am beseeching you on behalf of me countrymen and your brothers and I ask: give them the means of a livelihood. Give them a start. Write to:

“Diocesan Resettlement Director” in your diocese.

 I repeat: “Diocesan Resettlement Director” in you diocese.

 A sincere. May God repay you!

 Meanwhile I thank you from the bottom of my heart with prayerful greetings of health and blessings from our loving God for the New Year: not for this year but for coming times that you may live with great joy.

Ks. Biskup Jósef Gawlina.