December, 2025

VoiceAfrique Weekly Update

Catholic News Analysis from Africa by Africans, for Africa and the World

THE EDITORIAL

God Is With Us: Advent, Hope, and the Courage to Believe Again

By Fr. Stan Chu Ilo - Coordinating Servant

At Christmas, the Church across Africa and the global diaspora returns to a truth that is both simple and demanding: God is with us. This is not a seasonal slogan or a comforting metaphor. It is the core proclamation of Christian faith and the deepest source of hope for a wounded world.

The angel's announcement to Mary still resounds across history: she would bear a son whose name would be Emmanuel—God-with-us (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). In this name lies the heart of the Gospel. Christianity is not first a moral system, an ideology, or a set of rituals. It is the astonishing claim that God has chosen to dwell with humanity, to enter history, and to share fully in the human condition.

By the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son of God embraced our flesh, our vulnerabilities, and our stories. He entered the concrete realities of human life—joy and sorrow, hope and disappointment, faith and fear. In Jesus Christ, God did not remain distant from suffering, injustice, or uncertainty. God entered them. This is why Christmas speaks so powerfully to Africa today, a continent marked by resilience amid struggle, faith amid fragility, and hope amid delay.

To say "God is with us" is to affirm that nothing in our personal or communal lives lies outside the reach of God's love or saving power. Our lives are not ordinary; they are sacred. African history—its wounds and its promises—unfolds not in the absence of God, but in God's abiding presence.

Christian faith insists that we do not walk alone. Through Baptism, believers are united with Christ. Through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, this communion is deepened and renewed. In this mystical union, what is fragile in us—fear, fatigue, discouragement, wounded trust—is continually transformed by what is divine, faithful, and life-giving. Christmas reminds us that God's grace works quietly, often invisibly, yet persistently within history.

The manger also reveals the humility of God. God chooses not power but vulnerability, not privilege but poverty, not domination but nearness. This has profound implications for the Church and society. It is a call to servant leadership, to humility, and to a style of faith that resists fear, resentment, and hardened

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Voice Afrique

Catholic News Analysis

Merry Christmas

ideologies. It challenges forms of leadership—ecclesial, political, and social—that rely on control rather than service, exclusion rather than solidarity.

Much of the anxiety that grips our societies today flows from forgetting this Gospel truth. The fear that fractures communities, the impatience that fuels anger, the mistrust that erodes institutions—all are signs of a faith still learning to rest in the assurance that God remains present even when change is slow and the future uncertain. Christmas invites believers to recover moral courage and spiritual vigilance rooted in trust, not panic.

If Christmas is lived not as an annual ritual but as a daily reality, hope will not disappoint us. We will not surrender to despair or lose our capacity to imagine a more humane future. At the end of his earthly mission, Jesus reassured his disciples: "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). From the manger to the Cross, and beyond, this promise endures. God's fidelity does not waver with history's turbulence.

Today, people are not only searching for God in documents, declarations, or conferences. They are searching for God in living communities—communities marked by prayer, mutual care, intellectual honesty, and self-giving love. This is the Church's most credible witness in our time.

As Africa and the world celebrate Christmas, the proclamation remains clear and demanding: God is with us. To believe this is to find courage again. To live it is to become a sign of hope for others.

Peace, love, and blessing.

THE ADVENT FEATURE

THE STAR OVER AFRICA: A Continental Journey to the Manger

By Sr. Helen Kasaka, LSMI

Throughout this December, the PACTPAN community has walked a path of intense spiritual and social reflection. Our guide has been the ancient prophecy of Isaiah—reminding us that the people walking in darkness have seen a great light. This light has been reflected through our unique African **"Palaver"**—the traditional communal dialogue where we sit together to speak the truth, listen deeply, and restore harmony.

Week I: The Foundation – An Awesome Vocation

The journey began with His Eminence, Cardinal Wilfrid Fox Napier, OFM. Reflecting on a year that saw him travel from the solemn synodal halls of Rome to the 75th hierarchy anniversary celebrations in Ghana, the Cardinal observed a stark contrast. While the Church celebrates its milestones and structures, the people on the ground—particularly in South Africa—often feel "deceived" by a cycle of leadership that promises transformation but delivers stagnancy.

He challenged us to see that the "Great Light" is not a political program, but a Person—Jesus Christ. He reminded us that our Baptism is an awesome vocation, a frightening responsibility that calls us to move beyond passive faith. To walk in this light, he proposed three dominant actions: walking intimately with Jesus daily, building the Church through tangible acts of faith, and witnessing to the Truth even when the shadows of corruption loom large.

"Baptism is not just a ritual; it is an awesome vocation that carries the frightening responsibility of being a light in a world often deceived by corrupt leadership."

Week II: Restoring the Fragments – The Healing of Memories

On December 12th, Monsignor Emmanuel Marie Mbock Mbock, Vicar General of the Diocese of Eséka, Cameroon, brought the Palaver to the heart of African pain. Addressing the wounds of regional conflicts, border disputes, and the tragedy of lives lost in custody, he spoke of the "Healing of Memories" as the only path to a sustainable peace.

Drawing from the biblical transformation of Joseph, who saw God's providence even in the betrayal of his brothers, the Monsignor

illustrated how God can take the "shattered pieces" of a broken history and restore them into a beautiful whole. He emphasized that healing is not merely the passage of time, but a deliberate encounter with grace. Christmas, then, is the Divine Visit where God enters our brokenness. He called us to be "wounded healers" who transform our own scars into a legacy of mercy for the next generation.

"For Africa to move forward, we must become wounded healers who allow the Divine Physician to transform our fragments of pain into a legacy of peace."

Week III: A Prophetic Advent – Governance and the African Spirit

The third week brought a powerful call for justice from His Eminence, Cardinal John Onaiyekan. Linking the Advent expectation directly to the social state of the continent, the Cardinal argued that our spiritual preparation is meaningless if it remains purely liturgical. Invoking the spirit of *Africae Munus*, he insisted that a true Advent must involve the "remission of debts"—both the financial debts that cripple our economies and the moral debts of failed governance.

He spoke sharply against "structural sins" and the arrogance of power that keeps the poor in darkness. For the Cardinal, the humility of the Manger stands as a permanent judgment against those who use authority for self-gain rather than service. He urged the African Church to be the conscience of the continent, ensuring that the Light of Truth exposes the systemic failures that continue to plague our nations.

"Advent must be more than ceremony; it must be a season where the humility of the Manger serves as a permanent critique of the arrogance of power."

THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Arrival at the Crib: The Architecture of Faith

By J.B. Hayes, SJ

Fr. J.B. Hayes, SJ, a member of the Society of Jesus, brings the Ignatian tradition of finding God in all things to our final Palaver. His reflection serves as the theological bridge between our historical struggles and our spiritual destiny.

The tradition prefers to see Jesus as God's pathway to help us share, now and after death, in God's fullness of life. We have discovered that the "higher power" we seek is a Trinity of persons—God reaching out in love and inviting all who choose to respond to share in God's own life.

Armed with this good news, we are now ready to kneel before the crib. With Mary, we praise what God is showing us of the mind and heart of the "higher power" through the baby Jesus. With Joseph and Mary, we commit ourselves to parent our universe in a way that reflects the heart of the Creator. Like the shepherds and the wise searchers, we bring our attempts at true and authentic worship, recognizing that God is now "one of us."

As the baby grows, may we get to know the mind and heart of God more accurately. May we grow more sincere in accepting God's outreach. May our understanding of God and the values of Jesus give us the wisdom and creativity needed to heal our world.

The happiness of Christmas, unfortunately, will not come to all as too many still have to struggle in a cruel and often heartless world. We take heart that the basis of happiness does not come from our own goodness, but from the nature of the God we try and worship and witness to. May we, in our own way, reflect a little of the mind and heart of God who chooses to become little so that we may become great.

APPRECIATION

A Note of Gratitude to our Zoom Community

By the editorial team

A Note of Gratitude to Our Zoom Community. To our global PACTPAN family: Thank you.To the hundreds of participants who joined us from across Africa, the Americas, and Europe: You are the heartbeat of this network. Your presence, your insightful contributions in the chat, and your shared prayers have transformed our "Friday Palavers" into a sacred space for communal discernment. You have shown that we are of one Spirit, united in hope. We look forward to continuing this dialogue with you in the new year

Christmas in Africa this Year

By Stan Chu Ilo

I remember the conversation I had with my late uncle, Felix Mgbo. This was a few years after I left my home country, Nigeria, for Rome. Uncle Buga asked me: "Are you coming home for Christmas?"

"No, Uncle Felix, not this time," I replied, sounding rather flat.
"Do you realize," he said, his voice suddenly heavy with emotion, "that you have not been to our maternal home for Christmas since you left the country?"

"Yes," I replied, "but you know it is not possible for me to leave my people here in Italy during this great celebration."

"So you prefer them to us, and they are now your people?" he wondered aloud. "We miss you so much, and I am not sure if they celebrate Christmas in Italy the way we do here. I hear it is so cold where you are spending Christmas in Northern Italy that people celebrate Christmas indoors...."

He went on and on, trying to convince me that I needed to come home for Christmas—especially that year, when my late father was celebrating his first Ofala as the traditional monarch, one of the biggest cultural feasts in my community.

The end of the year is usually a time when

many family members and friends from Africa make strong appeals to those of us who live and work in North America and Europe to come home for Christmas. This is because Christmas in Nigeria is a homecoming. Christmas in Nigeria, and in many African communities, is the biggest celebration of the year. It is a time of reunion for families, towns, and clans. Cities empty out as people return to their ancestral homes or places of birth to celebrate with family. Christmas in Africa is a time when every child must get a new dress. "Christmas dress" has become a metaphor in Nigeria for a new outfit—so when you dress very well, people say, "You must be wearing your Christmas dress."

What makes Christmas in Nigeria particularly striking is that it is a celebration for everyone—Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of African Traditional Religions—no one is excluded. Christmas is, for our people, a social sacrament of belonging."
— STAN CHU ILO

What makes Christmas in Nigeria particularly striking is that it is a celebration for everyone—Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of African Traditional Religions—no one is excluded. Christmas is, for our people, a social sacrament of belonging. It is a time for reconciliation within families, a moment to take stock of the past year, especially the spiritual and moral lives of individuals, families, and communities. Priests sit in confessionals for hours in the final week before Christmas, listening to the unending lines of penitents seeking forgiveness, healing, and a fresh beginning.

Christmas is also a time when communities plan development initiatives, reflect on communal challenges, and renew commitments to shared responsibility. Families organize prayer gatherings, Christmas "crusades," prayer vigils, reconciliation meetings, special intercessory prayers, and festive parish Masses. It is also during this season that people pay condolence visits to families who have lost loved ones during the year and bring gifts to babies born in the past twelve months. Christmas becomes a bridge between grief and hope, loss and life.

The mutual exchange of gifts and visits remains central. Children go door to door receiving gifts and money, which they proudly bring home to their parents. Parishes often receive more offertory at Christmas than during the rest of the year combined. In Eastern Nigeria, Christmas is also the season of masquerades and traditional dancing troupes, performing in public squares and street corners, showcasing ancestral creativity and communal joy. Christmas in Africa is a weeklong—sometimes month-long—celebration: a carnival of faith, culture, friendship, sports, family, and community.

The high point is the Christmas Midnight Mass—often followed by fireworks and traditional gun salutes welcoming the Christ Child. Families then return home for the Christmas banquet. Large extended families may slaughter a cow; smaller households prepare goat, ram, turkey, or chicken. The Christmas table is rich. I have never known anyone in my community to go hungry on Christmas Day. Even the poor are welcomed by neighbors and relatives. Christmas is a season of open doors—no appointments needed. Everyone belongs.

Obviously, Christmas is a Christian celebration with roots in the West, but it has been embraced fully and creatively by Africans. God leaves footprints in the sands of history, revealing how the Gospel takes flesh in new cultures. Christmas in

Africa bears unmistakably African features—communal, generous, embodied, noisy, joyful, and reconciliatory.

This year, however, I cannot write about Christmas in Africa without a heavy heart. *I wonder how Christmas will be celebrated by families fleeing war in Sudan, by communities living under the shadow of violence in the Sahel, by villages emptied by banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria, by survivors of massacres and sexual violence in eastern Congo, by children growing up amid extremism and terror in parts of Somalia, Mozambique, and the Lake Chad Basin."*

— STAN CHU ILO

I wonder how Christmas will be celebrated by families fleeing war in Sudan, by communities living under the shadow of violence in the Sahel, by villages emptied by banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria, by survivors of massacres and sexual violence in Eastern Congo, and by children growing up amid extremism and terror in parts of Somalia, Mozambique, and the Lake Chad Basin. I wonder how Christmas will be celebrated by refugees in camps across Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Chad, and Niger; by internally displaced families sleeping in churches, schools, and makeshift shelters; by mothers who no longer know where their sons are; and by fathers who can no longer protect their families.

In many places across Africa today, Christmas arrives not with fireworks but with fear; not with open doors but with guarded silences; not with full tables but with empty hands, empty stomachs, and empty hearts... The Church herself in Nigeria this year will celebrate Christmas amid mourning."

— STAN CHU ILO

In many places across Africa today, Christmas arrives not with fireworks but with fear; not with open doors but with guarded silences; not with full tables but with empty hands, empty stomachs, and empty hearts. Extremism, political violence, ethnic hatred, climate disasters, and economic despair have wounded the African family and torn at the fragile fabric of communal life. The Church in Nigeria this year will celebrate Christmas amid mourning—burying catechists, priests, religious men and women, and lay leaders killed simply for choosing faith, peace, dialogue, and hope.

And yet, I propose that Christmas still matters.

For Christmas is not primarily a feast of abundance, but of vulnerability. God comes not as a warrior, but as a child. He enters history not through fortified palaces, but through a displaced family searching for shelter. The African experience of Christmas—rooted in family, hospitality, reconciliation, and shared life—offers a powerful antidote to the culture of death now stalking many regions of the continent.

Christmas in Africa, even now, remains a stubborn proclamation: **life is stronger than death, family is stronger than fear, and hope—because God has pitched his tent among us—will not be extinguished by the pockets of darkness on the horizon.**

Author

Stan Chu Ilo

Stan Chu Ilo is a senior research professor of world christianity, african studies, and global health at the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural theology, DePaul University, and the coordinating servant of the Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network.

CHRISTMAS 2025: Emmanuel in a Wounded World

A Reflection on Faith, Justice, and Hope

By Sr. Stella Kanyunyuzi, DST, FCCA

As the Church celebrates Christmas in 2025, we proclaim anew the central mystery of our faith: God has chosen to dwell among His people. This truth echoes across continents and cultures—from villages to cities, refugee camps to universities, chapels to marketplaces. Yet this year, Christmas finds humanity at a critical crossroads, felt at every level of our shared existence.

The world continues to wrestle with armed conflicts, forced migration, economic uncertainty, climate change, moral disorientation, and a deepening fatigue. Africa, though rich in faith, culture, and youthful promise, is not spared. Nations like Uganda confront daily hardships: poverty, unemployment, corruption, fragile health systems, environmental strain, and social inequalities that weigh most heavily on women and the young.

It is precisely into this wounded world that Christ is born. Christmas is not an escape from reality, but God's decisive entry into it.

The Incarnation: God's Answer to Human Fragility

The Gospel of John declares, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This is not merely doctrine—it is pastoral truth. God does not save humanity from a distance. He enters into history, culture, and vulnerability, born poor, dependent, and exposed, sharing fully in the human condition.

In Africa, where life is often marked by resilience amid hardship, the Incarnation speaks with particular force. Christ is born not only in Bethlehem, but symbolically in the huts of rural villages, in urban slums, in hospital wards, and in refugee settlements. In Uganda, where many families struggle for daily necessities, Christmas affirms that God's presence is not reserved for the secure or wealthy, but draws nearest to those who suffer.

This divine choice stands as a challenge to global systems that prioritize profit over people and power over service. It calls the Church and society to a renewed commitment to justice, solidarity, and human dignity.

Mary and Joseph: Faithful Disciples in Uncertainty

Mary and Joseph embody faith amid uncertainty. Their journey to Bethlehem was marked by displacement, discomfort, and risk. They controlled no political decrees, held no privilege, and had no guarantee of safety—yet they trusted.

Their witness resonates across Africa

today, where countless families are on journeys not of their choosing: fleeing conflict, seeking work, pursuing education, or navigating illness. Christmas reminds us that God accompanies His people even when the path is unclear.

For those in intellectual, academic, and professional ministry, the Holy Family offers a crucial lesson: faith does not remove uncertainty, but gives it meaning. As a researcher, I am reminded that while data and theory are vital, they must remain humble before mystery. The Incarnation transcends human logic—God chooses vulnerability as the path to redemption.

Consecrated Life: Living the Mystery Daily

Consecrated life is a daily proclamation of Christmas. Through vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, religious women and men testify that God alone is sufficient. In a world driven by accumulation, competition, and self-promotion, this witness is both prophetic and urgent.

Across Uganda and Africa, religious sisters serve in schools, hospitals, parishes, universities, and social ministries. Often quietly and without recognition, they embody the spirit of the manger: service without applause, leadership without domination, love without condition. Christmas renews the call to simplicity, availability, and compassionate presence.

The Child of Bethlehem invites consecrated persons to ask essential questions: Are our lives still transparent signs of God's nearness? Do we remain close to the poor, the young, the elderly, and the wounded?

Christmas, Peace, and Social Responsibility

The angels' proclamation—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace" (Luke 2:14)—is not sentimental poetry. It is a mission. Peace is not passive; it is built through justice, dialogue, ethical leadership, and care for creation.

In Uganda, where communities yearn for integrity in governance, unity across divides, and opportunity for the young, Christmas challenges Christians to become active agents of transformation. The birth of Christ calls us beyond charity alone toward structural compassion—addressing the roots of suffering while nurturing hope.

In a wounded world, Christmas remains the enduring promise: Emmanuel, God with us. And in that presence, we find the courage to live by faith, pursue justice, and hold fast to hope.

Author

Sr. Stella Kanyunyuzi, DST, FCCA, is a member of the Daughters of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus (Banyatereza Sisters) in Uganda. A Fellow of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (FCCA) and a PhD candidate in Finance and Accounting, she blends her professional expertise with her religious vocation to advocate for ethical financial stewardship, social justice, and the empowerment of the marginalized within the African context.

A CHRISTMAS INVITATION: Becoming Neighbors of Light in a World Shadowed by Addiction

By Simon Mary Asese Aihiokhai

The Nativity reveals God's intimate closeness to a wounded world—and calls each of us to reflect that light, especially to those bound by the false comforts of addiction.

A world in perpetual need of transformation forever requires the proximal closeness of God's light. The Nativity fulfills this need, revealing God's intimate nearness to each of us and offering a vision of what it means to be fully human. The Christ Child, the light of God entering our world, stands as a divine invitation: to embrace God as our nearest neighbor, and in turn, to become neighbors of light to one another. This call holds special urgency for those living in the shadows of social evils inflicted by a broken world.

The False Light of Addiction

As we reflect on how to embody this light, my thoughts turn to the many in our world who suffer from addiction. Humanity is prone to various forms of dependency—whether embraced willingly or imposed by harsh social realities. For some, it is an addiction to wealth or power; for others, to substances, food, social media, or gossip. In every case, the turn to addictive behavior represents an unhealthy pursuit of a false light—a mirage that promises fulfillment but delivers only deeper darkness.

Answering the Nativity's Ethical Summons

The Nativity stands as an ethical summons to counter this deception by becoming sources of true light for one another. To embody the grace of Christmas is to choose this sacred neighborliness. The gift of the Nativity is an anthropological grace; it makes us whole, healing our collective and individual brokenness. It provides a new vision and purpose, orienting us toward a praxis of radical closeness.

The grace of the Nativity is a reminder for us to become bearers of a new narrative to all who live in the valley of death.

Carrying a New Narrative

This grace defines us as bearers of life and authors of a new narrative—one we must carry to all who dwell in valleys of despair, that they might rise with us to the mountains of transformation. There, we see clearly the glory of God and the enduring grace Christ introduced into the world.

The Enduring Grace of Peace

Ultimately, the grace of Christmas is an enduring grace of peace—for the human heart and for our shared world. This Christmas, let us pause and pray earnestly for this peace. A world free from war is a world saturated with hope. A world filled with hope is one where addictive chains can be broken and new life embraced by all.

May the Infant Jesus, the very symbol of God's peace, be a fountain of guiding light as we renounce violence and embrace the way of peace.

Merry Christmas to you all.

Author
SimonMary Asese Aihiokhai
SimonMary Asese Aihiokhai, PhD, is full professor of theology (systematics) and religious studies, and affiliate faculty of ethnic studies at the University of Portland.

The Baby Who Changed Everything

Fr. Joseph Hayes, SJ

A Humble Beginning

Many years ago, a baby was born whom none of us have ever seen. Francis of Assisi, who lived more than a thousand years after that birth, suggested that if we are to be channels of God's desire for peace, we should spend time kneeling before the crib and reflecting on the life of that child.

The Life That Spoke and Healed

Those who did welcome the baby saw him grow up to say and do profound things. As an adult, he was called Joshua—meaning "God saves"—and demonstrated remarkable concern for those whom society tended to look down upon and exploit. He possessed a great ability to heal the sick and give meaning to those oppressed by mental and spiritual sickness. He did not judge people who failed to live morally upright lives but encouraged them to develop better habits. He spoke of an invisible world beyond our understanding, teaching that the power behind all existence is on our side, desires to share life with us, and possesses a mind and heart like our own. He suggested we call that final cause "gentle parent" or "gentle father." Finally, he sought to form a small community of people who trusted him and, like him, wished for others to feel loved and experience greater joy.

The Price of Love

Joshua faced intense opposition from those who resisted having their political or religious authority questioned. He was arrested, tortured, and killed. At 33 years old, it seemed to be the end.

The Impossible Hope

But then, a small group began to report the impossible: they claimed he was still alive and with them. He wanted his work to continue and, though invisible, would help them by sharing his way of loving—a love that would supplement their own. Some trusted this claim; most did not. Some of us here tonight have also chosen to trust that small group, while many may still find it difficult to believe.

The Transforming Trust

Those who did trust understood that human beings cannot raise themselves from death. They came to believe this baby must be more than human. For those of us who trust—or try to trust—that he is more than a human being, we find our lives and our thinking slowly transformed over the years. This belief brings deep joy, a profound sense of safety, and support, and from that joy springs a desire to share it.

A Christmas Invitation

Have a wonderful Christmas and a New Year, in which we may deepen our commitment to work with Jesus (Joshua) and play our part in making our families and our world a little more filled with peace.

ABOUT PACTPAN

A Church That Walks Together

Voice Afrique

Catholic News Analysis

The Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN) bridges the gap between the academy and the parish. Based at the Center for Catholicism and Intercultural Theology in Chicago, our network stretches across the continent and the diaspora to ensure African voices are at the heart of global Catholic discourse. We remain committed to being a Church at the service of reconciliation, justice, and peace.

Editor-in-chief: Fr. Stan Chu Ilo

Editors: Fr. Nnaemeka Ali

Sr. Helen Kasaka

Graphic Designer: Robert Munthali

Email: admin@pactpan.org

Website: www.pactpan.org