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There is something about the Christmas season that makes hope feel easier to grasp. For many people, December naturally invites a more obvious sense of optimism and goodwill. Everywhere we turn, cheerful songs seem to follow us, colorful and nostalgic decorations light up our homes and neighborhoods, and classic movies about generosity, forgiveness, and love play on repeat. Long-held traditions draw us back to memories of family and seemingly less complicated times. With all of this around us, it's hard not to feel at least a spark of hope and get swept up in the Christmas spirit.

At the same time, I know firsthand that the holidays can be incredibly difficult. For those who are grieving a loved one, living with an illness, facing financial stress or loneliness, "Christmas cheer" can

feel far out of reach. That's why the hope of Christmas can't be reduced to fleeting comfort — it has to be something deeper, something strong enough to hold both joy and sorrow at once.

Even many secular Christmas songs reflect that same longing. They sing about coming home, fixing broken relationships, and finding peace, usually with a sense of waiting woven in. I think that's why those songs resonate with so many of us. They name something we all carry: the hope that what feels broken can somehow be made whole again. Even without explicitly mentioning faith, those songs still point toward a deeper truth that finds its fulfillment in the mystery of Christmas.

For me, that deeper truth comes through religious Christmas music — especially my favorite song, *O Holy Night*. Every time I hear it, I'm struck by the line: "A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices." It feels so honest and real to me. It doesn't pretend the world isn't tired or broken, but it also insists that weariness isn't the end of the story. Something new has entered the world, and because of that, joy is still possible. It names suffering and injustice head-on and then points straight to Christ as the one who changes everything. "Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother." That's hope rooted in the Incarnation of Jesus. A hope that restores dignity, reminds us that we belong to one another, and

challenges us to live differently because God chose to draw near.

As the Church brings this Jubilee Year of Hope to a close, that message feels especially timely. A jubilee isn't just a celebration; it's an invitation to remember God's faithfulness and to become a sign of hope for others. In that light, Christmas music becomes more than a seasonal tradition. It becomes a proclamation. Every carol we sing announces that God is still at work, continuing to enter the ordinary realities of our lives.

After all, Jesus wasn't born in a palace or under extraordinary circumstances, but in a humble manger. In the same way, we're invited to look for hope not only in big moments or special seasons, but in the everyday details of life. Christmas reminds me that we don't have to wait for a particular time of year to be people of hope. While this season makes hope easier to recognize, our call as Christians is to carry it with us all year long. Hope isn't something we pack away with the decorations; it's something we're meant to live every day.

So, as you listen to Christmas music, whether it's a familiar hymn at Mass or a song playing on the radio, I pray that it helps you tune your heart to God's presence. May it bring comfort to those who are struggling, strength to those who are weary, and a reminder that Christ continues to be born into the ordinary moments of our lives.

MISSION MESSAGE

A Thrill of Hope: Learning to 'Hear' Christmas All Year

By Shannon Kowalski
Diocesan Director,
of Pontifical Mission Societies



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