

Dear Jamaica,

As we head into the Christmas Season and the close of another year. I give thanks to God for blessing and protecting this beautiful country and I thank you the good people of Jamaica for the privilege and honour of leading this country for yet another year.

An important part of job of a leader is to set direction and give hope, which is particularly important in times of crisis and bewilderment. The story of the birth of Jesus Christ, which we celebrate as Christmas, tells of the emergence of a spiritual leader who would give hope to a despairing people and direction along a pathway to peace and redemption.

So it is today, as it was in biblical times, there is despair, uncertainty and suffering for many:

- at the global level; with wars, climate disasters, pandemics, and economic crises;

- at the community level, with poor infrastructure and amenities like roads and healthcare, and a breakdown in public order;
- at the household level, with high cost of living, poor housing, and a feeling of insecurity due to crime and violence;
- and at the personal level, broken relationships consuming us with anger and rage, and unfulfilled desires and expectations weighing us down with depression and negative thoughts.

Yes, so much trouble in the world, but our faith tells us that Jesus came into the world to shine a light to nations, but more so to be the saviour of the individual soul, to help you find the pathway to peace in your life.

The important lesson in the birth of Christ, and in the life of Christ is that the solutions to national problems or personal problems do not lie in material things. Indeed, the story of the nativity is deliberate in Jesus being born in poor circumstances in a horse stable. And the life of Jesus was remarkably humbling as a carpenter.

However, his teachings were revolutionary in liberating the minds of the people from material worship and selfish desires to a deeper understanding of love and peace.

My leadership over the last two terms has focused on setting the economic engine on the right path to deliver the material variable in the equation of prosperity. However, it has always been my understanding that prosperity cannot be complete without peace. Indeed, the high levels of frustration and anger in our social interactions which manifest in violence is reducing our quality of life. You hardly hear the good old Jamaican courtesy of Howdy and Tenk you! Looking out for our neighbours and being parents for all the children in our community is no longer a feature of Jamaican civility. The rise in domestic violence means that we have gone back to the Old Testament Cain and Abel, we are no longer our brother's keeper. As you listen to me speak of these things, I know deep down you feel the same way and have the same concern about the moral and spiritual direction of our society. No doubt we are making economic progress, but we must now liberate the minds of the people and lift the spirit of the individual.

As your government we intend to mobilize more resources around social and human services. More counsellors in our schools and communities, more mental health support, greater support for families and family life, more engagement of our youth, a more wholesome public communication and safer public space. However, we do not have to wait on the bureaucracy of government to bring peace to our communities, households, and personal life, we can start right now at Christmas.

Bring some joy to kids in your community by organizing a Christmas treat, or simply buy them some toys or ice-cream. Surprise your neighbour with a gift or simply just reach out to say merry Christmas and how are you? Remember the elderly lady down the road who has no one to take care of her, share what you have with her. But remember that brother you argued with over the family land, the one with whom, in rage you exchanged violent words, call him up this Christmas and talk it over in peace. That anger that is inside you because of an abusive parent, jilted love, disrespect from a friend, over being overlooked by your boss, free yourself of the burden and let it go. Forgive!

Let us all vow to make definite steps towards peace in our life by being courteous in our interactions, showing concern and empathy for persons around you, sharing with those who are in need and above all forgiving those who have trespassed against us. These are practical steps that do not require government. It requires a change in our attitude and behaviour towards each other. These are indeed the teachings of Christ, spare a few minutes during the Christmas season to read Christ's prescription for personal peace and salvation in the gospels.

So make this a Christmas of reflection and outreach, happiness, and peace, and enjoy the goodness of life in our beautiful Jamaica. Drive carefully on the road, and if you don't drive, walk good! May love be the compass that directs your steps, kindness the language you speak, and compassion the armor that shields you from life's challenges.

From Juliet, Adam, Mathew, and me, have a Merry Christmas filled with love, joy, and the realization of your dreams.

Merry Christmas to each of you and God Bless Jamaica