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Pope Leo XIV greets crowd at St. Peter's Square on Christmas Eve (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Pope Leo XIV greets an estimated 5,000 people who could not get in to St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican for the Christmas Mass at Night Dec. 24, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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If people refuse to make room for others — like the poor, children and the stranger — then they also refuse to make room for God, Pope Leo XIV said as he celebrated the birth of Jesus.

"Where there is room for the human person, there is room for God," the pope said in his homily Dec. 24 as he celebrated the nighttime liturgy in St. Peter's Basilica.

"While a distorted economy leads us to treat human beings as mere merchandise, God becomes like us, revealing the infinite dignity of every person," he said. "While humanity seeks to become 'god' in order to dominate others, God chooses to become man in order to free us from every form of slavery."

The Christmas hymn, "Noel," was sung during the procession, and the Mass began with the Christmas proclamation, or "kalenda," of Jesus' birth. The pope lifted a cloth to reveal a statue of baby Jesus, which he then kissed and blessed with incense.

As the bells of St. Peter's Basilica rang loudly, announcing the birth of Christ, several children representing different cultures placed white flowers around the crib of baby Jesus.

Before the Mass, Pope Leo appeared outside the basilica to greet some 5,000 people gathered in the square under the cold, pouring rain. The basilica was near capacity, and large screens set up in the square allowed the overflow crowd to follow the liturgy.

"Good evening and welcome!" the pope said to the crowd outside.

"The basilica of St. Peter's is very large, but unfortunately, it is not large enough to receive all of you. I admire and respect and thank you for your courage and your wanting to be here this evening," he said in English.

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"Jesus Christ, who was born for us, brings us peace, brings us God's love," he said before heading back to the basilica for the Mass. More than 6,000 people were in the basilica, and guards were reportedly letting additional people in from the rain during the service.

In his homily, the pope reflected on how, for millennia, people looked to the heavens for guidance and a truth that was missing below on earth.

With the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the One who redeems humanity is born, the pope said. "To find the Savior, one must not gaze upward, but look below."

"The omnipotence of God shines forth in the powerlessness of a newborn," he said. "The divine light radiating from this Child helps us to recognize humanity in every new life."

"To heal our blindness, the Lord chooses to reveal himself in each human being," Pope Leo said. "As long as the night of error obscures this providential truth, then 'there is no room for others either, for children, for the poor, for the stranger,'" he

said, quoting from Pope Benedict XVI's homily on Christmas Eve in 2012.

His predecessor's words "remain a timely reminder that on earth, there is no room for God if there is no room for the human person. To refuse one is to refuse the other," he said.

"The wisdom of Christmas," he said, is that God gives the world a new life — his own, offered for all — in the Child Jesus. "He does not give us a clever solution to every problem, but a love story that draws us in."

"Will this love be enough to change our history?" he asked. "The answer will come as soon as we wake up from a deadly night into the light of new life, and, like the shepherds, contemplate the Child Jesus."

God sends a child to be "a word of hope," he said, recalling how exactly one year ago, Pope Francis began the Holy Year dedicated to hope on Christmas Eve. The year will run through Jan. 6, 2026.

"Now, as the Jubilee draws to a close, Christmas becomes for us a time of gratitude" for the gift received and mission to bear witness to it before the world, he said.

"Let us therefore announce the joy of Christmas, which is a feast of faith, charity and hope," he said, and become "messengers of peace. With these virtues in our hearts, unafraid of the night, we can go forth to meet the dawn of a new day."

After the Mass, Pope Leo carried the figurine of the baby Jesus to the Nativity scene at the back of the basilica. Flanked by children on either side, the pope went to the crèche, and the Jesus figurine was placed in the manger. The pope blessed the crowd as he left the basilica.

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