

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DECEMBER 16, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
LIGHTING OF THE
NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS TREE

THE ELLIPSE

5:35 P.M. EST

Thank you very, very much. Thank you Mr. Dixon, Mr. Ambassador, Secretary Kleppe, Mayor Washington, Director Everhardt, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

As our bicentennial year comes to a close, it is especially appropriate to gather once more around the traditional symbol of family ties and friendly reunions, our Nation's Christmas tree.

In doing so, we combine our year-long celebration of historical events with a personal rededication to timeless values. The message of Christmas has not changed over the course of 20 centuries. Peace on earth, good will towards men -- that message is as inspiring today as it was when it was first proclaimed to the shepherds near Bethlehem. It was first proclaimed, as we all know, then.

In 1976, America has been blessed with peace and a significant restoration of domestic harmony.

But true peace is more than an absence of battle. It is also the absence of prejudice and the triumph of understanding. Brotherhood among all peoples must be the solid cornerstone of lasting peace. It has been a sustaining force for our Nation and it remains a guiding light for our future.

The celebration of the birth of Jesus is observed on every continent. The customs and traditions are not always the same, but the feelings that are generated between friends and family members are equally strong and equally warm.

In a few moments I will turn the switch that lights up our national Christmas tree. As beautiful as that tree is, it will be only a symbol if its light is not matched by the glow of love in our hearts.

It is my personal prayer on this Christmas of 1976 that the tree which I light tonight is only the beginning, that each of you will also light a flame of love, love that is reflected in the eyes of all our brothers and sisters across the Nation and around the world.

Now, Betty joins me in wishing you all a very, very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Thank you, and God bless you.

END

(AT 5:42 P.M. EST)