

# 'Build the republic the 1916 leaders dreamt of'

PRESIDENT Michael D Higgins has urged people to build the republic the 1916 leaders dreamt of.

In his Christmas message, Mr Higgins said 2016 was a reminder of how precious freedom is and that elements of the Rising should be a lasting source of pride and a guide for the future.

The President criticised the international community's response to the refugee crisis and other conflicts and humanitarian crises around the world.

'In the past year, we have witnessed horrific violence and suffering in countries such as Syria, Yemen and Iraq, but also closer to home in Istanbul, Nice, Brussels and in so many other towns and cities,' Mr Higgins said.

'Internationally, ever more children, women and men are on

## Irish Daily Mail Reporter

the move, living precarious existences in the refugee camps of the world, as conflict and disasters continue to force people to flee. The humanitarian situation of millions of vulnerable people is still awaiting an adequate global response.'

Mr Higgins also said the Nativity story - of forced migration, homelessness and powerlessness - is being re-enacted across the world and that the dream of peace on Earth can seem very distant.

He warned about a time of uncertainty across Europe and 'new forces' which seek to exploit old divisions or create new ones, including using ethnic exclusion. 'We need courage to depart from what has not served us well, and

we need the inspiration to make new connections with each other and with the vulnerable planet on which we live,' he said.

Mr Higgins added: 'Our solidarity is the heartbeat of our society. Our bonds are stronger than we think, and stronger than that which at times divides us.

'The complex world in which we live challenges us, but it does not pose greater challenges than those faced and overcome by previous generations, or by brave movements of the oppressed in world history.

'My wish is that, together, we will continue to seek to build the true republic of which our forebears dreamt, embracing the values, possibilities and responsibilities contained in that dream.'

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# Dr Mark Dooley



## MORAL MATTERS

# A festive time for the children ...and for the child in all of us

**T**HE night falls and small flames twinkle in the window. The long wait is over and the world is at peace. Peace: somehow it descends like the dewfall and calms the soul.

In the peace, the magic begins. It is not an invention, but something we all feel. Everything is quiet, except for the sound of homemaking in the kitchen.

The fire looks lazy, the embers glowing like a winter sunset. The scent of roast ham fills the house, a reminder of tomorrow's feast. The tree beckons and you don't hesitate.

Sitting there in the peace, carols playing in the background, you get the sense that this is how it should always be. There is no time like it because you are at home and that is where your heart is. It comes and it goes, but the memories remain long after the magic fades.

For weeks, the world seemed like it was spinning out of control. But now, in the deep, dark night, chaos gives way to calm. With a smile, all the anxiety simply melts away.

There is no snow, yet you feel as though it is everywhere. You keep looking at the clock and time seems to crawl. Finally, it is time to go to church.

Why is the church so full? If it is all a myth, why are they here? They come to hear about a baby who would become a king.

Everyone is in their new coats and scarves. Everyone seems happy. Everyone is at peace.

As you leave the church, people embrace and laugh. They say it is a 'night divine' and, in this moment, it all makes sense. You look skyward, but there is no sign yet.

You rush to get ready for bed. Fresh sheets and new pyjamas for the big night. As you listen to *The Night Before Christmas*, you cannot believe that you are about to experience the real thing.

They tuck you in and their kisses seem so full of love. You lie there in the darkness and hear them clink their glasses. They call it a 'nightcap' which always makes you giggle.

You twist and you turn. What if you can't sleep? Will you be left out?

You hear sounds on the stairs. You look at the clock and it is the middle of the night. It must be - it can't be!

You wake before six but you dare not stir. What if you get up and he's still there? What if he catches you peeping around the door?

Your heart is pounding but you have been warned to stay in bed. It is like no other morning of the year. It is very cold and yet you feel nothing but warmth.

It's too much - you just have to get

up. You creep into their room but they are still asleep. You realise they were only pretending when they shout: 'Happy Christmas!'

You all get ready to see the surprise. The candles are lit and the kettle sings in the kitchen. And there, under the tree, is all you had hoped for and more.

You gasp and run towards the gifts which seem wrapped in wonder. It takes you a minute to notice the empty glass and half-chewed carrot. You turn to see their smiling faces, their eyes so full of tender tears.

You hug them with all your strength before returning to your toys. He lights the fire as carols play softly on the radio. You smell sausages and oven-baked bread.

She calls and you all dash to the table. In the middle is a small crib surrounded by holly and tealights. You haven't tasted anything like it since this time last year.

You know you are part of something special, something that puts children right at the very centre.

It is as if this day is just for you and for all little ones. It seems like a good way to celebrate His birthday.

**Y**OU are now an adult and the magic seems to have lost its sparkle. The little ones have grown up and moved on. You have grown up and moved on with only your memories of a paradise lost.

And yet, we are nothing but our memories. No matter how old, you are the child that was loved, the child that savoured the beauty of a world steeped in Christmas wonder.

Deep down, you are still the child whose excitement could not be contained as dusk dawned on that 'night divine'.

Christmas is an ideal and we all need our ideals. We all need those moments in the year when we rediscover the child within, when we relive those times which gave us our first glimpse of beauty, peace and wonder. And while it may not always live up to our expectations, Christmas gives us our chances to once again welcome the wonder.

So go, go now 'with a faery hand in hand'. Go to that place of dreams, 'mingling hands and mingling glances, till the moon has taken flight'. Then, as the radiant dawn rises, keep watch and wait for all that is to come.

Keep watch because, with each and every Christmas, there is hope that things long lost may once more return. There is always hope that, as you stand beside the tree, you will see again their smiling faces.

You will see again their tender tears reflected in your own.

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