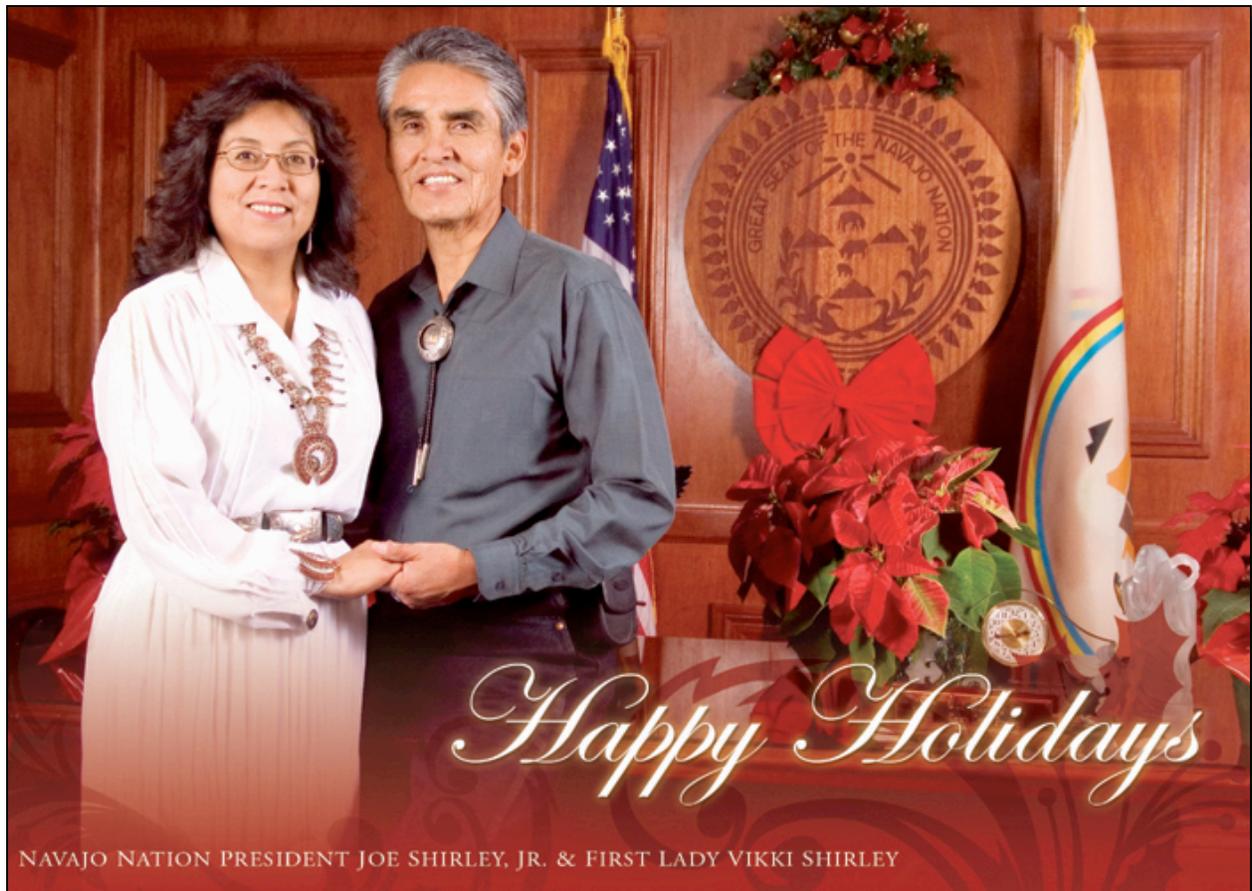


A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

FROM

NAVAJO NATION PRESIDENT JOE SHIRLEY, JR.
& FIRST LADY VIKKI SHIRLEY



KEEPING THE SACREDNESS OF CHRISTMAS

In our Navajo way of life, many things are sacred to us; our families, our homes, our livestock, our ceremonies and our lands. Now we come into a time of year – the Christmas season – that is also sacred.

The Christian teaching is that a special child was born on Christmas who is the Son of God. His message for all the world is one of love and peace and goodwill to all. His instruction to his disciples and to all who will hear is to love thy neighbor. This is the sacred message of Christmas.

To Navajos also, this is truth. It is our way of life to care for those in our family, our community, our clan. Every Navajo family rejoices in the birth of a new child and grieves the loss of our loved ones. We care for each other, and we see this in all of our communities at Christmastime, each celebrating in their own way.

To Navajos, life, and every day of it, is sacred. We remember this each time we pray, each time we offer our corn pollen. We are sacred in the eyes of the Holy Ones. To Navajos, truth is found in our sacred songs, sacred ceremonies and sacred mountains.

In the same way, the truth of Christmas is found in the sacred words of the Bible. It's a time for us to turn inward and to think about our relationship with the Creator and with each other as brothers and sisters. In doing so, we think unselfishly about others who matter. The elderly and children come to mind. We know our grandmothers and grandfathers are looking for a visit from their children and grandchildren on Christmas Day.

It fills their hearts to have someone stop by, chop wood for them, haul water, make a fire, cook a meal, wash some laundry. These ordinary chores become acts of love, bringing ease and peace to our older ones.

Of course, Christmas is all about children, too. Many of our Navajo children live harder lives than you would imagine. For many reasons, they are forced to leave the innocence of childhood behind and grow up sooner than their years. On Christmas, let our children be children. Let them enjoy the happy songs and share in the opening of a gift and a good meal. No Navajo child should be allowed to go without a gift at Christmas.

If your child is in a Christmas play at school, go see it. Be with them for this important event in their lives. We need to share with them why Christmas is a sacred day and why they should learn to revere it.

There are those who are less fortunate. Some among us cannot walk or see, talk or hear. Some are without a home to go to. Some are deeply distressed by problems or face financial difficulties. Some don't have enough food. Some don't have enough wood. Some have no transportation.

There are among us elderly who go to sleep hungry and lonely, and children with no shoes for little feet. Let us all be cognizant of our relatives who have less or must go without. Try to share a little that's left over from your paycheck or pantry, even at a sacrifice.

Lastly, we cannot forget our freedom and the people who ensure it will be there when will wake up each dawn. Across the big waters right now are our service men and women, some still in their teens, others with young families, making sacrifices for us. While we share Yule time carols, laughter and open presents on Christmas day, our soldiers are in harm's way with threats all around. They remain on the lookout for our freedom.

Some make the ultimate sacrifice each day in Iraq and Afghanistan. We need to be aware of this, and ask the Creator to look after them. For our part, we can send them e-mail, call them, even share a gift with them. We need to. We must. Because of our soldiers, because of our veterans and their families, our land and way of life is protected and continues. Because of them, we enjoy Christmas in the way that we do and we cannot forget that.

May each of you have a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year in 2006!