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# Messenger

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**God's Blessings in the New Year 2013**  
**May this be a 'Year of Faith'**

## BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

THE NEW YEAR MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS, POPE BENEDICT XVI, ON WORLD DAY OF PEACE, ADVOCATED ON JANUARY 1, 2013



**E**ACH NEW YEAR brings the expectation of a better world. In light of this, I ask God, the Father of humanity, to grant us concord and peace, so that the aspirations of all for a happy and prosperous life may be achieved.

Fifty years after the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, which helped to strengthen the Church's mission in the world, it is heartening to realize that Christians, as the People of God in fellowship with him and sojourning among mankind, are committed within history to sharing humanity's joys and hopes, grief and anguish, as they proclaim the salvation of Christ and promote peace for all.

In effect, our times, marked by globalization with its positive and negative aspects, as well as the continuation of violent

conflicts and threats of war, demand a new, shared commitment in pursuit of the common good and the development of all men, and of the whole man.

It is alarming to see hotbeds of tension and conflict caused by growing instances of inequality between rich and poor, by the prevalence of a selfish and individualistic mindset which also finds expression in an unregulated financial capitalism. In addition to the varied forms of terrorism and international crime, peace is also endangered by those forms of fundamentalism and fanaticism which distort the true nature of religion, which is called to foster fellowship and reconciliation among people.

All the same, the many different efforts at peacemaking which



*Children bring up the offertory gifts to Pope Benedict XVI during the Mass for the feast of Mary Mother of God and World Peace Day in St. Peter's Basilica.*

abound in our world testify to mankind's innate vocation to peace. In every person the desire for peace is an essential aspiration which coincides in a certain way with the desire for a full, happy and successful human life. In other words, the desire for peace corresponds to a fundamental moral principle, namely, the duty and right to an integral

social and communitarian development, which is part of God's plan for mankind. Man is made for the peace which is God's gift.

All of this led me to draw inspiration for this Message from the words of Jesus Christ: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will

(CONTD. P 2>>)

### CATHOLIC CHURCH TO OPPOSE REMOVAL OF CHAPEL WITHIN MAGAZINE PRISON

**T**he Catholic Church is to lodge a strong protest about a move to remove a chapel from inside the New Magazine prison in Welikada, Borella, depriving the inmates of a place for prayers.

Fr. Hilary Peiris, the chaplain said that he had been informed by inmates, that a prison official had allegedly assaulted an inmate who was maintaining the place.

He said that the inmate maintaining the place, had been ordered to remove all statues, and when he refused to carry out the orders, he had been assaulted.

Rev. Fr. Peiris said that he will not be able to conduct the service due to be held today at the chapel, due to the incident.

Meanwhile, the injured prisoner, Stephen Dudley Nadaraja has been admitted to the prison hospital.

However, Prisons Commissioner, General Kodippilly claimed he was unaware of a directive given by one of his junior officers to remove the chapel from the prison, and claimed that the 'caretaker' inmate had taken an overdose of diabetic drugs and was hospitalised.

He added that this 'caretaker' inmate had to be removed as he was a remand prisoner.

(Courtesy: Sunday Times)

### ANNUAL FEAST OF THE HEAVENLY BIRTH OF BLESSED JOSEPH VAZ

- January 20, 2013 -



**A**ll parishes in the Colombo Diocese will celebrate the Feast of Blessed Joseph Vaz on January 20, 2013. Every Seminary, Catholic School, Institution and Convent will make arrangements to celebrate this event, with special emphasis for the speedy canonization of our beloved Apostle of Sri Lanka.

Programme schedule for the islandwide celebrations appear in page 2.

### THE PARISH CRIB A VIBRANT MESSAGE

**I**t is the crib of the parish church, that attracts all respective parishioners, to venerate and pay homage to baby Jesus at Christmas. Thus all parishes do their utmost to make the crib natural and real. Some even innovate it to give a message in keeping with the times. The vibrant message of a crib, is the story of Incarnation, prompted through love, which leads all mankind to redemption.



Photos of cribs erected at some parishes appear on page 8.

### A MUSEUM AT ST. ANTHONY'S SHRINE KOCHCHIKADE

**A** museum which holds the sacred relics of St. Anthony, the iconic saint of many, housed at the premises of St. Anthony's Shrine, Kochchikade, will be declared open on January 13, 2013.



### LOVE SPILLS OVER ENCOUNTERING FLOOD VICTIMS IN THE CHILAW REGION

**C**ontinuous torrential rains that brought about floods which inundated the Chilaw region, left tens of thousands of people displaced and homeless. Most of them who were reduced to a state of being refugees, were provided with cooked meals, dry rations, clothing and other basic needs.

The National Caritas together with the Chilaw Diocesan Caritas, the Bishop of Chilaw and many others who were sensitive to the needs of the victims, were actively involved in providing relief assistance.

Most of the flood victims were Catholics, but could not celebrate Christmas in the traditional way. Nevertheless they experienced the love and kindness of sharing at Christmas, through the generous donors and volunteers who assisted them.



## New Parish Priest at Alagollewa Diocese of Anuradhapura



Very Rev. Fr. Sunil Rupasinghe, SSS, the Provincial Superior of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation has appointed Rev. Fr. Samantha Senanayake, SSS as the New Parish Priest of St. Anthony's Church at Alagollewa with effect from January 6, 2013.

Rev. Fr. Mahendra Anandappa, SSS, the outgoing Parish Priest, who has Doctorates in Sacred Scripture and in Psychology, will go as minister to Christ the Divine Healer Centre, Sillalai in the Diocese of Jaffna.

Fr. Samantha who had served as the Assistant Parish Priest at Alagollewa (2006-2007) gained valuable experience as Assistant Director of Scholastics (2007-2009) and Assistant Administrator at St. Philip Neri's Church, Pettah (2009-2012) since his ordination to the priesthood in 2006.

The installation of the new parish priest will take place on the January 6, 2013 by the Bishop of Anuradhapura, Most Rev. Dr. Norbert Andradi, OMI, in the presence of Very Rev. Fr. Sunil Rupasinghe, SSS.

We wish Fr. Samantha and Fr. Mahendra God's choicest blessings in their new ministries.

## Christmas gathering for the Elders at Katana



St. Vincent De Paul Society of the Katana Deanery held a special Christmas gathering for the elders at the Madampella Parish recently. President of the Katana SVP, Lucian Samarawickrama is seen distributing the gifts.

*Cecil Danicius*

## Tambakanda, Parish celebrates Elder's day



Elder's day was held at Tambakanda recently under the guidance of Rev. Fr. Stanley Joseph Peiris, Parish Priest. Twenty-five sick elderly persons participated on this occasion. A special Mass was celebrated by Rev. Fr. Stanley Peiris.

*C. D.*

**Novena to  
St. Anne at  
Wattala  
begins on  
4th January  
2013  
at 6.00 p.m.**

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St. Anne's Society, Wattala donated school books and equipments to 119 children from low income families in Wattala area recently. Here Rev. Fr. Basil Wickramasinghe Parish Priest of St. Anne's Church, Wattala is handing over some gift parcels to the children. President of the society Malinga Jayawardana and secretary, Sunil Visidagama are also in the picture.

*Nimal Perera*

## 'Christmas Zone' in the Chilaw Diocese



A 'Christmas Zone' was declared from the town of Marawila up to Mahawewa. Crib and carol competitions were held amidst a large gathering of Priests, Religious and parishioners.

## Thirty Six years of "Unduwap Mihira" - The Christmas Annual

The launch of the 36th publication of "Unduwap Mihira" the Sinhala Christmas Annual was held from the Town Hall, Ja-ela, recently.

Founded in 1976, under the guidance of Rev. Fr. Ernest Poruthota, the annual is coedited by Maximus Roy Perera and Shiran Maithri. The dedicated consistency and the free distribution of the magazine every Christmas for the past 36 years, is a praiseworthy achievement.

This years ceremony commemorated the literary artistic works of twenty two Catholic artists who were felicitated with awards of certificates and trophies.

Chief guest in attendance was Upali Arambawatte, Chairman, Urban Council, Ja-ela. Among

others who addressed the gathering were Rev. Dr. S. Pushparaja, Director of Divine Family Protection Service, Ragama, Ven. Hanguranketha Shathaje-

eva Thero, Shiran Maithri, Sub Editor of Gnanartha Pradeepaya, Calistus Jayamanne, Director (Disabled) Department of Social Services, famous cartoonist

Camillus Perera and Rev. Fr. Gregory Jayantha Fernando, Parish Priest of Ja-ela.

*M. Emil P. Perera*

## Annual Feast of the Heavenly Birth of Blessed Joseph Vaz - January 2013

**Programme for the Islandwide celebrations.**

**COLOMBO DIOCESE :**

16th January 2013 17.30 - ST MARY'S CHURCH - PITIPANA (NEGOMBO)  
20th January - 2013 08.30 - OUR LADY OF SORROWS CHURCH - PALLANSENA  
Chief celebrant: Rev. Fr. Anthony Fernandopulle, Episcopal Vicar  
08.00 - BLESSED JOSEPH VAZ CHURCH - MAKOLA  
08.00 - HOLY ROSARY CHURCH - WAGA (KANDEWATTE)  
08.00 - BLESSED JOSEPH VAZ CHURCH - MODERA (MORATUWA)  
07.30 - B.J.V DEVA DHARMA NIKETHANYA - SHANTI NIVASA - MODERA  
08.00 - INFANT JESUS CHURCH - KALAMULLA (KALUTARA)

All parish churches in the Colombo Diocese will celebrate the Feast on the 20th January 2013

**JAFFNA DIOCESE**

20th January 2013 08.00 - JAFFNA FORT SHRINE - JAFFNA

**KANDY DIOCESE**

20th January 2013 07.30 - BLESSED JOSEPH VAZ SHRINE - AMPITIYA  
Chief Celebrant: Very Rev. Fr. Elmo Dias - Rector, National Seminary Ampitiya

**GALLE DIOCESE**

16th January 2013 09.00 - ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL - GALLE  
Chief Celebrant: Rt. Rev. Bishop Raymond Wickremasinghe - Bishop of Galle

**CHILAW DIOCESE**

13th January 2013 07.30 - BL. JOSEPH VAZ SHRINE - WATTAKALLIYA  
Chief Celebrant: Rt. Rev. Valence Mendis - Bishop of Chilaw

**TRINCOMALEE DIOCESE**

20th January 2013 07.30 - BLESSED JOSEPH VAZ SHRINE - THANNEAMUNNAI  
Chief Celebrant: Rt. Rev. Dr. Kingsley Swamipillai - Bishop of Trincomalee

**BATTICALOA DIOCESE**

20th January 2013 CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF PRESENTATION - THANDAVANYLEY  
Chief Celebrant : Rt. Rev. Joseph Ponniah - Bishop of Batticaloa

**BADULLA DIOCESE**

20th January 2013 08.00 - BALAKETUWA  
Chief Celebrant : Rt. Rev. Winston Fernando - Bishop of Badulla

**MANNAR DIOCESE**

16th January 2013 05.45 - St. SEBASTIAN'S CATHEDRAL - MANNAR  
Chief Celebrant : Rt. Rev. Rayappu Joseph - Bishop of Mannar

**ANURADHAPURA DIOCESE**

20th January 2013 BLESSED JOSEPH VAZ SHRINE - THEMADDU

**KURUNEGALA DIOCESE**

14th January 2013 08.00 BLESSED JOSEPH VAZ SHRINE - GALGAMUWA  
Chief Celebrant: Rt. Rev Dr. Harold Anthony Perera - Bishop of Kurunegala and Bishop Emeritus Rt. Rev. Raymond Peiris

**RATNAPURA DIOCESE**

20th January 2013 08.00 - BLESSED JOSEPH VAZ CHURCH - ATH OYA



# Blessed are the.....

Contd. from Pg. 1

peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Mt. 5:9).

## Gospel beatitude

2. The beatitudes which Jesus proclaimed (cf. Mt 5:3-12 and Lk 6:20-23) are promises. In the biblical tradition, the beatitude is a literary genre which always involves some good news, a "gospel", which culminates in a promise.

Therefore, the beatitudes are not only moral exhortations whose observance foresees in due time - ordinarily in the next life - a reward or a situation of future happiness. Rather, the blessedness of which the beatitudes speak consists in the fulfilment of a promise made to all those who allow themselves to be guided by the requirements of truth, justice and "love. In the eyes of the world, those who trust in God and his promises often appear naive or far from reality. Yet Jesus tells them that not only in the next life, but already in this life, they will discover that they are children of God, and that God has always been, and ever will be, completely on their side. They will understand that they are not alone, because he is on the side of those committed to truth, justice and love. Jesus, the revelation of the Father's love, does not hesitate to offer himself in self-sacrifice. Once we accept Jesus Christ, God and man, we have the joyful experience of an immense gift: the sharing of God's own life, the life of grace, the pledge of a fully blessed existence. Jesus Christ, in particular, grants us true peace, which is born of the trusting encounter of man with God.

Jesus' beatitude tells us that peace is both a messianic gift and the fruit of human effort. In effect, peace presupposes a humanism open to transcendence. It is the fruit of the reciprocal gift, of a mutual enrichment, thanks to the gift which has its source in God and enables us to live with others and for others. The ethics of peace is an ethics of fellowship and sharing. It is indispensable, then, that the various cultures in our day overcome forms of anthropology and ethics based on technical and practical suppositions which are merely subjectivistic and pragmatic, in virtue of which relationships of coexistence are inspired by criteria of power or profit, means become ends and vice versa, and culture and education are centred on instruments, technique and efficiency

alone. The precondition for peace is the dismantling of the dictatorship of relativism and of the supposition of a completely autonomous morality which precludes acknowledgment of the ineluctable natural moral law inscribed by God upon the conscience of every man and woman. Peace is the building up of coexistence in rational and moi terms, based on a foundation whose measure is not created by man, but rather by God. As Psalm 29 put it: "May the Lord give strength to his people; the Lord bless his people with peace" (v. 11).

## Peace: God's gift and the fruit of human effort

3. Peace concerns the human person as a whole and it involves complete commitment. It is peace with God through a life lived according to his will. It is interior peace with oneself, and exterior peace with our neighbours and all creation. Above all, as Blessed John XXIII wrote in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, whose fiftieth anniversary will fall in a few months, it entails the building up of a coexistence based on truth, freedom, love and justice. The denial of what makes up the true nature of human beings in its essential dimensions, its intrinsic capacity to know the true and the good and, ultimately to know God himself, jeopardizes peacemaking. Without the truth about man inscribed by the Creator in the human heart, freedom and love become debased, and justice loses the ground of its exercise.

To become authentic peacemakers, it is fundamental to keep in mind our transcendent dimension and to enter into constant dialogue with God, the Father of mercy, whereby we implore the redemption achieved for us by his only-begotten Son. In this way mankind can overcome that progressive dimming and rejection of peace which is sin in all its forms: selfishness and violence, greed and the will to power and dominion, intolerance, hatred and unjust structures.

The attainment of peace depends above all on recognizing that we are, in God, one human family. This family is structured, as the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* taught, by interpersonal relations and institutions supported and animated by a communitarian "we", which entails an internal and external moral order in which, in accordance with truth and justice, reciprocal rights and mutual duties are sincerely recognized. Peace is

an order enlivened and integrated by love, in such a way that we feel the needs of others as our own, share our goods with others and work throughout the world for greater communion in spiritual values. It is an order achieved in freedom, that is, in a way consistent with the dignity of persons who, by their very nature as rational beings, take responsibility for their own actions.

Peace is not a dream or something Utopian; it is possible. Our gaze needs to go deeper, beneath superficial appearances and phenomena, to discern a positive reality which exists in human hearts, since every man and woman has been created in the image of God and is called to grow and contribute to the building of a new world. God himself, through the incarnation of his Son and his work of redemption, has entered into history and has brought about a new covenant between God and man (cf. Jer 31:31-34), thus enabling us to have a "new heart" and a "new spirit" (cf. Ez 36:26).

For this very reason the Church is convinced of the urgency of a new proclamation of Jesus Christ, the first and fundamental factor of the integral development of peoples and also of peace. Jesus is indeed our peace, our justice and our reconciliation (cf. Eph 2:14; 2 Cor 5:18). The peacemaker, according to Jesus' beatitude, is the one who seeks the good of the other, the fullness of good in body and soul, today and tomorrow.

From this teaching one can infer that each person and every

(Contd. on Pg. 9)

## Notice

Representations have been made to me by concerned priests and some Catholic faithful about a recent Rupavahini Christmas programme telecast from St. Sebastian's Church, Sea Street, Negombo on Christmas day. It has been brought to my notice that the event included singing by different artists and dancing done during the programme within the premises of the church and also in the sanctuary. A musical group had performed in the sanctuary.

I wish to inform the faithful that I had no prior information on this event nor was permission obtained from me to do this. Besides, many seem to have been disturbed by what happened, and so I tender an apology to all of them. In addition the Sea Street church will now be blessed once again and reparation done for this act of disrespect to the Most Holy Sacrament.

At the same time I wish to inform all the Catholic faithful herewith and all the priests in the Archdiocese of Colombo that such manifestations will not be permitted hereafter within the premises of the church, under any circumstances. The choir of the parish can sing at the Liturgy as usual which includes singing Christmas carols. If any special *choral concerts* are to be conducted with religious songs sung by the choir or an invited choir the Rev. Fathers are hereby requested to obtain permission from me directly. *Musical bands* are not to be allowed in any case. This would be in line with the *Circular on Guidelines for Liturgy* issued by me in the year 2009. The Church is the House of God and the place of the majestic presence of the Lord in the Most Holy Eucharist and so the sacredness of the premises should always be maintained. I call upon all concerned to follow this guidance as faithfully as possible.

May God bless you!

Yours devotedly in Christ,



✠ **Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith**  
Archbishop of Colombo  
28th December 2012



## "HE WAS BORN TO BE OUR SAVIOUR"

St. Mary's Choral Group at St. Mary's Church Bambalapitiya gathered for a Carol Service on December 16, 2012. Mons. Renato Kucic, Secretary to the Apostolic Nuncio in Sri Lanka, presided. (Archdiocesanwebsite)

## Notice

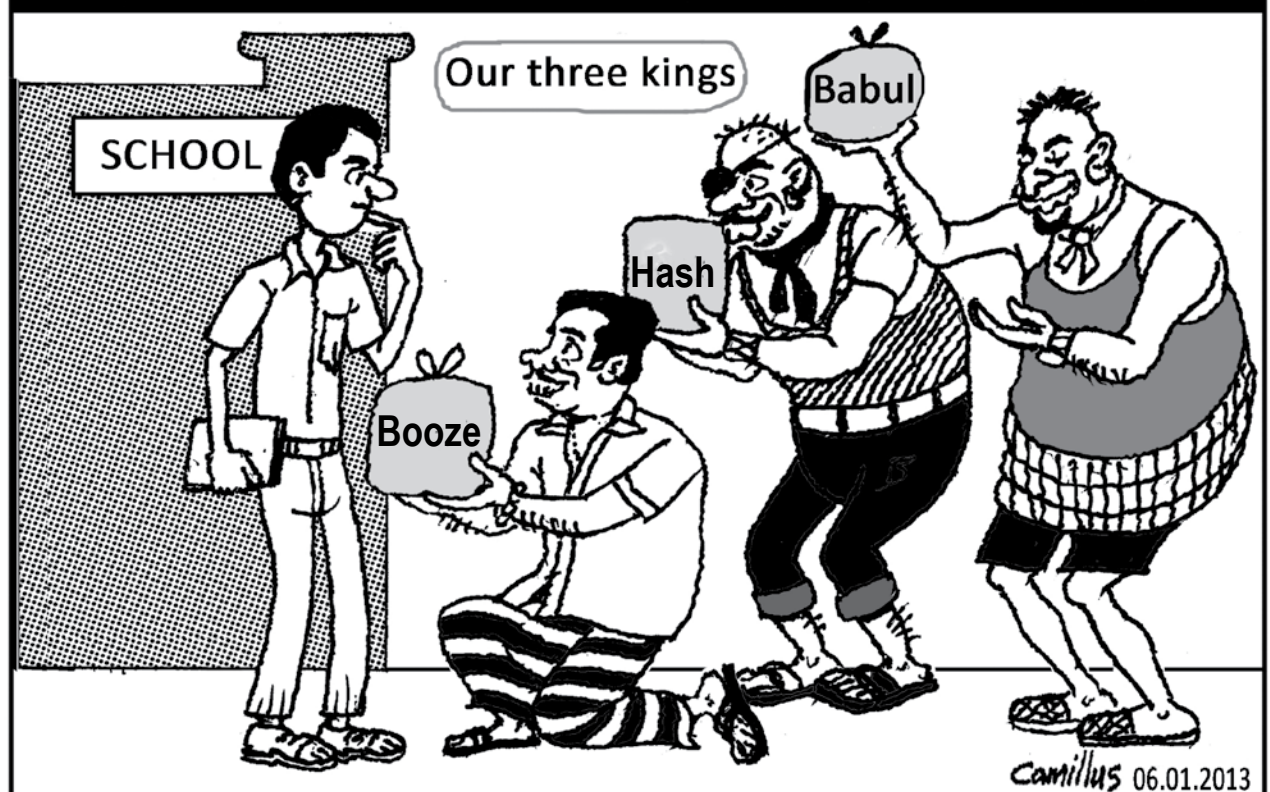
The meeting of the Archdiocesan Biblical Commission (ABC), presided over by His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, is scheduled on the 18th of January, 2013 at 4.30 pm at Cardinal Cooray Auditorium in Aquinas University College, Colombo 08. All the members are requested to attend this first meeting of the year 2013.

**Rev. Fr. Don Anton Saman Hettiarachchi**  
Director, Archdiocesan Biblical Apostolate



## SUNDAY PUNCH

by Camillus



Camillus 06.01.2013



THE CATHOLIC WEEKLY OF SRI LANKA  
**Messenger**  
SINCE 1964

EDITORIAL

January 6, 2013

## The Year in Retrospect

The year just ending will be remembered for the mass hysteria created about the end of the world which was thought to occur last week around December 21-23. The heavens have however continued as before although there were natural catastrophes and floods in our own country. But the last week also saw terrible tragedies caused by the wickedness of man. A gunman killed 21 innocent children in a school in Connecticut in USA. Remember how when Jesus was born Herod slaughtered all new born babies in an attempt to kill baby Jesus.

When suffering takes place people are prone to ask why? Most religions say it is due to the sins of the people in their present or past lives. Some ask "Why didn't God merely create a world where tragedy and suffering didn't exist?" The answer is: He did! Genesis 1:31 says: "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good."

But if God is not the author of tragedy or evil or death, where did they come from? Well, God has existed from eternity as the Father, Son and Spirit, together in a relationship of perfect love. So love is the highest value in the universe. And when God decided to create human beings, he wanted us to experience love. But to give us the ability to love, God had to give us free will to decide whether to love or not to love. Why? Because love always involves a choice. If we were programmed to say, "I love you," it wouldn't really be love. A toy doll may be programmed to say "I love you" each time it is wound up. But could that doll love his owner. It was only programmed to say those words. To really experience love, that doll would need to be able to choose to love or not to love. Real love always involves a choice. We have the choice- to love our fellow beings or not. We have abused our free will by rejecting God and turning away from Him. And that has resulted in the introduction of evil. Romans 3:23 says "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

So much of the world's suffering results from the sinful action or inaction of ourselves and others. People look at a famine and wonder where God is, but the world produces enough food for each person to have 3,000 calories a day. It's our own irresponsible organization of the global economy that prevents people from getting fed.

What about floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and other natural disasters? The Bible says it's because of sin that nature was corrupted and "thorns and thistles" entered the world. Romans 8:22 says, "We know that the whole of creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." Scientists have recognized how the actions of man have disturbed nature. Everybody is now talking about climate change which is caused by carbon emissions due to the excessive use of fossil fuels. Man's irresponsible actions are the source of natural disorder and chaos.

The Bible Old Testament referred to the wickedness of the people and their punishment by God. But in the New Testament, Jesus made things clearer. The story of this world is not over yet- God just didn't create the world and human beings and let them fend for themselves. No he has a plan to make things perfect. Jesus has said that the day will come when sickness and pain *will* be eradicated and people *will* be held accountable for the evil they've committed. That day will come, but not yet. So what's holding God up? One answer is that He may be doing so for we have not yet carried out His mission to bear witness to His love and to preach His word to the world. He's perhaps delaying the end to give time for those in the world who have not yet heard of Him and His message, but will put their trust in Him in the future when they do.. He's delaying everything out of His love for humankind. 2 Peter 3:9 says: "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some of us think. He is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. We wait for the new world where righteousness will be at home"

*Our suffering will pale in comparison to what God has in store for his followers.*

While not minimizing pain and sorrow it helps if we take a long-term perspective. Look at the above verse and remember they were written by the apostle Paul, who suffered through beatings and stoning and shipwrecks and imprisonments, rejection and hunger, thirst and homelessness. This is far more pain than most of us will ever have to endure. Let us wait patiently for the Lord.

# A Detour at Christmas time

Jeannette Cabraal

A quick twelve month revolution and it's Christmas time once again. "The Season's here" scream out the advertisements and the commercials to the accompaniment of the jolly strains of 'Jingle Bells' and an even jollier Santa Claus replete with a fat paunch and a bulging sack full of goodies, whatever they may be, according to the forte of the advertiser. Scenes of raucous laughter, merriment, jollity, wine and song abound; far superseding the soothing, sobering tranquil effect of the strains of 'Silent Night' and overshadowing the humble repose of the crib.

"Christmas comes but once a year and when it comes it brings good cheer" goes the

the innocent, hungry, downtrodden, bereft little ones, perhaps query.

The Season leaves much to be desired in the context of a truly meaningful Christmas and its identification with the scenario in the stable and calls for much soul-searching on the part of the celebrants. The period immediately preceding Christmas is the season of Advent, a preparation for the coming of the Messiah, a fitting preparation of adjusting ourselves to the true meaning of Christmas and not on the materialistic binges we set our minds on.

If in our rush and over-eagerness to rejoice on the coming of the Messiah, we pause awhile to think of Christ's birth in relation to the world around us, then the true significance of Christmas would come home to us. The number



hackneyed proverbial reference to Christmas. It is indeed a cheer of a different sort and of diverse varieties, trumped up for the season. This is the spirit that is highlighted and propagated, not so much the goodwill induced spirit, of giving and sharing of God's abundant mercies and bounties, with those deprived.

And all this over doing to celebrate the birth of a lowly Babe born in poverty for whom there was no room at any inn save in a cowshed. This birth which is truly representative of the lowly and the humble and the rejects of the earth, is completely blown out of proportion and becomes a celebration of those who can afford the ostentation, while the other half, the worse off half, gapes in wonderment at a magnificent display way beyond their most extended imagination.

Indeed the birth of the long-expected long-awaited Messiah who was born in abject poverty and who came to redeem mankind, merging a birth with death, initiating the Testament of Love- Love for mankind, is a justified cause for celebration. But celebration within the bounds of a certain austerity the circumstances of the birth calls for. More so, in this time of continual conflict, the society where bitterness and strife prevail, distorts the message of 'Peace and Goodwill' which is the embodiment of Christmas. Today we merely pay lip-service to this 'Peace and Goodwill'.

The Season savours glamour, surfeit and voluptuousness, while on the other hand are those who exist at mere survival level, in hovels and shanties in most unsavoury conditions and circumstances. On one side, Santa's fantastic visits with dream gifts. How come, Santa that jolly, good-natured, benevolent personality, misses or avoids the other side of the street -

of rejects among us and around us spawning the big city in their numbers; those relegated to Homes for Elders pining away in loneliness, heart-broken over their rejection; orphans and war widows, those out there under the stars where one day is like another, all dependent on the little mercies that may chance to come their way, to lighten the darkness of their lives'.

If we but see the rejection of Christ and His mother in those among and around us, we have understood the true meaning of Christmas.

*Peace be with you!*

## A Christmas Poem

The cold wind blows through my hair  
whispering in my ear,  
that December has finally arrived  
and life is full of cheer!

The mornings are just beautiful  
the birds singing so free,  
all nature's full of joy and love  
Christmas is finally here!

The decorations all laid out  
The crib beneath the tree,  
The Christmas cards we gladly write  
The gifts we wrap with glee!

But Christmas is not about  
the buck we spent or two,  
it's the humble thought that counts  
and the joy I find in you!

Let's cherish friends and family  
be kind to everyone,  
for Christmas is a time to give  
share joy, be glad and love!

I wish you a Merry Christmas  
may God Almighty bless you all,  
never forget your Saviour Christ  
Jesus loves us all!

Gillian Fernando



# Shepherds and Wise Men worship the new born Baby

Walter Rupesinghe

Several people in Israel thought that the birth of Jesus, whom they expected to be a political Messiah who would free them from the cruel yoke of Roman rule, would be announced to those in power, the high and the mighty, the chief priests and the elders of the land. This was not to be because the Kingdom of Jesus was not of this world. They expected Him to be born in a royal court replete with all the trappings of comfort. They were disappointed. They could not believe that He was born in a lowly stable in Bethlehem with a manger for His bed. This was undoubtedly the most stupendous moment in the history of mankind. Just imagine the all powerful Son of God, the Creator of the Universe coming down from heaven to redeem us from our sins beginning his redemptive process in a lowly stable in Bethlehem kept warm by the breath of sheep and donkeys who shared the stable with Him. This is the inexplicable contradiction of the first Christmas.

There were only two select groups of people who were privileged to hear the first news of the Royal Birth - some rustic shepherds of humble origin who were keeping their nightly watch over their flocks of sheep on the outskirts of Bethlehem and the Wise men, the Magi, from far off eastern lands who were genuinely searching for the Unknown God. Commenting on this Archbishop Fulton Sheen says in his "Life of Christ" -

*"Only two classes of people found the Babe: the shepherds and the wise men: the simple and the learned: those who knew that they knew nothing and those who knew that they did not know everything. He is never seen by the man of one book never by the man who thinks he knows. Not even God can tell the proud anything. Only the humble can find God."*

When we meditate on the events of that first Christmas we are reminded of the stirring words of the prophet Isaiah - "My thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways my ways" says the Lord "For as the heavens

are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8 and 9)

Let us now have a closer look at each of these two groups of privileged people who worshipped the new born Babe in the little town of Bethlehem.

## The lowly shepherds

In Old Testament history they were a group of rustic shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks at night, in the fertile valleys steeped in the vicinity of Bethlehem. It was here that Jacob had pitched his tent to mourn for his beloved wife Rachel. It was here that the beautiful Ruth had been working in the cornfields of the wealthy Boaz, who married her later. It was in these valleys that the young David was looking after his father Jesse's sheep, when he was summoned by Samuel and anointed King of Israel.

It was a cold night and the shepherds were huddled together around a fire to keep themselves warm and engaging in idle prattle to keep themselves awake. The silence around them was broken only by the occasional howling of wolves who were waiting for an opportunity to pounce on the sheep. Then suddenly everything changed. There was a bright light in the sky and they began to tremble with fear. Then an angel of the Lord appeared, the glory of the Lord shone upon them. The angel said to them "Fear not (noli temere) for I have to announce good tidings of great joy to you and all the people. Today in Bethlehem the city of David, is born to you a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. This shall be a sign unto you; you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." While they listened with surprise caught up in the celestial radiance a host of angels appeared in the sky and sang in heavenly voices which echoed through the hills and valleys "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of goodwill. Soon it was all over and the skies were filled with darkness once again. When the shepherds had sufficiently recovered from this terrifying experience they said



to one another "let us go over to Bethlehem and see the thing that has come to pass which the Lord has made known to us." When they reached the city they made inquiries and eventually found the Royal Baby in a cave used as a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger on a bed of straw, with Joseph and Mary by His side. The shepherds were full of joy as they worshipped the Baby. When they had seen Him they spread the word concerning this Child that had been told to them and all who heard them were amazed. The shepherds then returned to their flocks glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

## The Wise men or the Magi

We now come to the second group of chosen people who were privileged to worship the Royal Babe in Bethlehem. They came from Eastern lands far, far away. They were very intelligent but very humble people who could read the stars like the palms of their hands. They were genuine searchers of the God of Truth, the Unknown God. They were very familiar with the Old Testament prophecies; the predictions made by Daniel the prophet as to the timing of the arrival of the Anointed. One who will rule the world (see Daniel 9:25 et seq.) and it must have been very much in their minds as they waited in eager anticipation of this unique event.

Then one day a new unusually bright star appeared in the sky. When

the three of them got together they conferred among themselves and concluded that this signalled the birth of a great king. They decided to travel westwards following the star until they found out where He had been born. They travelled very long distances on camel back and came to Jerusalem in Judea. Having arrived there they inquired from the people "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? We have seen his star in the East and have come to worship Him." All Jerusalem was disturbed by this inquiry which was made by three strangers. Tradition has it that their names were Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar. Artists have portrayed these three wise men as being of three different cultures - one white skinned, one brown and one black skinned, their argument being that Jesus Christ came to redeem all races and cultures in the world.

When King Herod heard that the wise men had come to Bethlehem in search of a new born king he was greatly worried that his thirty year rule would come to an end. So he summoned the Chief priests and the teachers of the law and asked them where the Christ was expected to be born. They told him that according to prophet Micah the child would be born in Bethlehem of Judah. Herod's mind was made up. He would destroy the child and nip the problem in the bud. So the cunning man that he was, summoned the wise men and told them to go to Bethlehem and make a careful search for the Child and as soon as they found Him to come back and report to him so that he too could go and worship the new born Baby.

When the wise men left Jerusalem to their great delight the star reappeared and went ahead of them and stopped over a humble house in Bethlehem. Entering this house they found Joseph and Mary and this new born Baby. They went down on their knees and worshipped Him. Then opening their treasures they presented him with Gold, Incense and Myrrh. The gold was an acknowledgement of His kingship, the incense an acknowledgement of His Godhead and the myrrh as a premonition of His death and burial.

Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod who was planning to kill the child they returned to their countries by a different route. We all know what happened thereafter. When Herod found that the wise men had cheated him, he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under. By then the angel of the Lord had appeared to Joseph and asked him to take the Child and His mother and escape into Egypt.

Let us now go in spirit to Bethlehem to worship the new born Babe  
Venite adoremus  
Venite adoremus  
Venite adoremus Dominum.

*A Blessed Christmas to all.*

## A Birth of a God

A Child is born,  
Yes, The Child is born.  
Mary and Joseph were on a journey  
to their native land.  
She was pregnant, heavy with child,  
But, the journey had to be made.

They sought for shelter, for a home, a place  
For the Child to be born  
No, there was no room the inns were full.  
They were merrymaking, was it for a  
Child to be born?  
No one gave them a welcome.  
None was worried, only Joseph.

'Yes Mary, I searched and searched,  
I found a place. Only a cattleshed'.  
Joseph sadly breaks the news to Mary,  
his pregnant wife. They knew the precious Child  
was God's own Son.  
And they brought Him forth in the cold!

Be assured Joseph, He is God's own Child.  
He will be cared for.  
The Baby cries. Angels sing.  
Shepherds listen. Magi get the news.  
Herod too.  
But God's plans will not be thwarted.

He is born. Cold, unwanted.  
Angels sing for joy. He gets a shepherd's welcome.  
The poor hasten to see this Child.  
Joy is everywhere.  
Did the world know who He was?  
There are questions, always questions  
Kings adore Him. Herod detests Him.

This little Child is born again this Christmas.  
Let us open our hearts, our homes to welcome Him.  
He is our God.  
Let us recognize Him in the orphan,  
the widow, the homeless, the street-child.  
The beggar on the road, the victim of violence.  
The prisoner, the lonely, the unloved.  
He is there in those who love us not.

Will He find room in the inn of our hearts?  
Can we take Him in? Comfort Him.  
Wrap Him in a warm blanket?  
He needs our love and care. Our concern.  
Our attention. Our hospitality  
It is this Child whom we celebrate.  
Let Christmas be Christmas, in the depths of our hearts.  
In our loving, our concern and our forgiving.

*Sr. Raphael HF.*



# The Foster Father

Joseph as usual was in his carpentry shop quietly getting about with his work, hammering a nail here, planing a plank there, as the shavings curled up on the floor. Although his hands plied his tools through sheer habit, he was in a pensive mood. Was it age catching up on him that caused this mood?

No! It was the young woman Mary, he was betrothed to, that caused him anxiety. She was a modest, chaste, demure, woman. He knew it. But of late he had certain misgivings. Was she really what he believed her to be? And what everyone believed her to be? She was generally considered to be an exceptionally good woman in all Nazareth. But of late all kinds of doubts assailed him. He stopped the planing abruptly. Yes! He had made up his mind. He would quietly put her away. Yes! That he would do. He would break away from her. He was sad but there was no other way.

That night he went to sleep and tossed restlessly the night through. But he had a strange dream.

A voice said to him. "Fear not Joseph to take Mary for thy wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will have a Son and you will name him Jesus. He will save people from their sins"

Poor Joseph was overwhelmed. He was a God-fearing man and so he simply accepted Mary without question. He was going to be the foster-father of the Child-the guardian. It was a great honour for him to be chosen to be the guardian of the God made man, and so he respected and honoured Mary, made her his wife and looked after her with tender, loving care.

Time moved on. Emperor Augustus passed a decree that a census should be taken of people in their own home-town. Joseph was compelled to go to Bethlehem for the registration, taking with him his wife Mary.

"...So Joseph and his wife Mary

Went to Bethlehem that night."

The journey was long, hard and tiring for poor Joseph who was not young. He had to take



Mary who was with child. He placed her on a donkey and led the animal through the congested streets of the town for the roads were crowded. He was sorry for Mary in that advanced state and yet he was tired too. Pleading at every inn and being turned away he lost confidence in himself.

"...They found no place to born she child

Not a single room was in sight."

He had to find a place. Desperately, frantically he called at every inn. "No room. No room. No room at all" they roared. Until an inn-keeper compassionately pointed to his backyard where there was a stable. Thankful for small mercies he took Mary

there. And there the Child was born.

"...And in a stable cold and dark

Mary's boy child was born."

Joseph was bewildered. He knelt in adoration before this God made man of whom he was to be the caretaker. Was he worthy of it he wondered. Could he make it? Simple man that he was, he was completely over-awed by all these happenings. Was it only a stable that he was able to provide for this God made man and for this Mother of God?

He felt his inadequacy when the three kings, the wise men came to worship the Son of God bearing expensive gifts of

Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

We three kings of Orient are

Bearing gifts we traverse afar

O'er field and fountain moor and mountain

Following yonder star.

This was mind-boggling for the simple carpenter. His responsibilities were not yet over. He could not complacently take the mother and Child back to Nazareth yet. He had to save the Child from Herod's decree - the massacre of innocents - for Herod had ordered that all children under three should be killed in the hope that thereby Jesus

too would be killed. He considered Jesus a potential threat in the worldly sense of kingship. Joseph had to take the mother and Child to safety as advised again in a dream.

Joseph's obligations as foster-father were burdensome. But at last guided by the spirit of God he took them back to Nazareth where he went back to his tools and his occupation. With the Child growing up within the shadow of Joseph's supervision and in the precincts of the carpentry shop, he became the guardian of the Saviour Child.



## Pope proposes serenity of Mary as model for peace

In the first day of the year, in which the Church also commemorates the World Day of Peace - established by Pope Paul VI in 1975 - the Holy Father said that Mary shows "the interior peace which we ought to have amid the sometimes tumultuous and confusing events of history, events whose meaning we often do not grasp and which disconcert us."

"Indeed, peace is the supreme good to ask as a gift from God and, at the same time, that which is to be built with our every effort," the Holy Father said presiding at the Mass celebrated in St. Peter's Basilica on the occasion of the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

"We may ask ourselves: What is the basis, the origin, the root of peace? How can we experience that peace within ourselves, in spite of problems, darkness and anxieties? The reply is given to us by the Readings of today's Liturgy. The Biblical texts, especially the one just read from the Gospel of Luke, ask us to contemplate the interior peace of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. During the days in which "she gave birth to her first-born son" (Lk 2:7), many unexpected things occurred: Not only the

birth of the Son but, even before, the tiring journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, not finding room at the inn, the search for a chance place to stay for the night; then the song of the angels and the unexpected visit of the shepherds. In all this, however, Mary remains even tempered, she does not get agitated, she is not overcome by events greater than herself; in silence she considers what happens, keeping it in her mind and heart, and pondering it calmly and serenely. This is the interior peace which we ought to have amid the sometimes tumultuous and confusing events of history, events whose meaning we often do not grasp and which disconcert us," the Pope explained.

The Gospel passage finishes with a mention of the circumcision of Jesus. According to the Law of Moses, eight days after birth, baby boys were to be circumcised and then given their name. Through his messenger, God himself had said to Mary - as well as to Joseph - that the Name to be given to the child was "Jesus" (cf. Mt 1:21; Lk 1:31); and so it came to be.

The Name which God had already chosen, even before the child had been conceived, is now of-

ficially conferred upon him at the moment of circumcision. This also changes Mary's identity once and for all: She becomes "the Mother of Jesus," that is the mother of the Saviour, of Christ, of the Lord. Jesus is not a man like any other, but the Word of God, one of the Divine Persons, the Son of God: therefore the Church has given Mary the title *Theotokos* or Mother of God.

The First Reading reminds us that peace is a gift from God and is linked to the splendour of the face of God, according to the text from the Book of Numbers, which hands down the blessing used by the priests of the People of Israel in their Liturgical assemblies. This blessing repeats three times the Holy Name of God, a Name not to be spoken, and each time it is linked to two words indicating an action in favour of man: "The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (6:24-26). So peace is the summit of these six actions of God in our favour, in which he turns towards us the splendour of his face.

Here, dear brothers and sisters, is the foundation of our peace: The certainty of contemplating

in Jesus Christ the splendour of the face of God the Father, of being sons in the Son, and thus of having, on life's journey, the same security that a child feels in the arms of a loving and all-powerful Father. The splendour of the face of God, shining upon us and granting us peace, is the manifestation of his fatherhood: the Lord turns his face to us, he reveals himself as our Father and grants us peace. Here is the principle of that profound peace - "peace with God" - which is firmly linked to faith and grace, as Saint Paul tells the Christians of Rome (cf. Rom 5:2).

Nothing can take this peace from believers, not even the difficulties and sufferings of life. Indeed, sufferings, trials and darkness do not undermine but build up our hope, a hope which does not deceive because "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (5:5).

May the Virgin Mary, whom today we venerate with the title of Mother of God, help us to contemplate the face of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. May she sustain us and accompany us in this New Year: and may she obtain for us and for the whole world the gift of peace. Amen!

## Gloria in Excelsis Deo



*Baby Jesus we are here to greet You.  
Lying on straw in a manger.  
Shepherds, lambs and oxen meet You,  
Surround You with love so tender.*

*The stars shone brightly in the sky.  
Angels sang, "Glory to God on high"!  
Peace on earth to His people so dear,  
'Tis our love that brought us here'.*

*There came the kings with their precious gifts,  
Of gold, frankincense and myrrh,  
King and Saviour, Your death foretold.  
Bringing us salvation and joy.*

*Mary did ponder in admiration,  
And Joseph in joy looked on,  
"Hurry! Go to Egypt with Mother and Child,  
Herod is determined to kill Him.*

*Joseph responded to the command,  
They journeyed steady and fast.  
God's own Son, like a helpless Babe,  
From Herod's wrath He ran.*

*No earthly power could ever destroy,  
God's power to save mankind.  
So peace and salvation came to us all,  
Sing, "Glory to God on High"!*

**Sr. Bridget Jayasuriya FMM**



# Our Lady's greatest title: Mary Mother of God

The Solemnity of "Mary, Mother of God" is the first Marian feast of the Roman liturgy. Mary, is the masterwork of the mission of the Son and the Spirit in the fullness of time. The beautiful pictures we present to you on this theme are from the Nazareth Retreat House, Nuwara Eliya. The statue at right is from the church dedicated to St. Padre Pio at Athurugiriya.

**(Feast 01 January)**



## “Do you see what I see”

Reflection; “Only two classes of people found the infant Jesus, the shepherds and the wise men. Those who knew nothing and those who knew they did not know everything”. The paintings below by reputed artist Nalini Jayasuriya, celebrate the adoration of the Christ Child by the Shepherds and the Magi.





By: Thilina Alahakoon



St. Theresa's Church, Thimbirigasyaya

Joseph Vaz Youth Club - Nayakakanda Church  
(on an anti abortion theme)

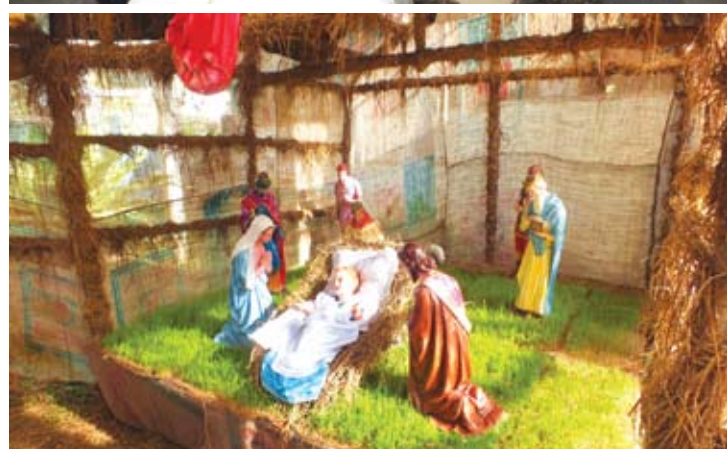
St. Mary's Church, Mattakuliya



Our Lady of Perpetual Help - Balagala Parish



St. Benedict's Church - Godigamuwa



Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church - Wellapalliya



St. James' Church - Mutwal



St. Andrew's Church, Lunupokuna



St. Peter's College - Bambalapitiya



Kiran Church - Batticaloa



St. Sebastian's Church - Batticaloa

The  
Parish crib  
gives a vibrant  
message and  
spells out the  
story of incar-  
nation to all  
humankind.



# Blessed are the.....

Contd. from Pg. 3

community, whether religious, civil, educational or cultural, is called to work for peace. Peace is principally the attainment of the common good in society at its different levels, primary and intermediary, national, international and global. Precisely for this reason it can be said that the paths which lead to the attainment of the common good are also the paths that must be followed in the pursuit of peace.

**Peacemakers are those who love, defend and promote life in its fullness**

4. The path to the attainment of the common good and to peace is above all that of respect for human life in all its many aspects, beginning with its conception, through its development and up to its natural end. True peacemakers, then, are those who love, defend and promote human life in all its dimensions, personal, communitarian and transcendent. Life in its fullness is the height of peace. Anyone who loves peace cannot tolerate attacks and crimes against life.

Those who insufficiently value human life and, in consequence, support among other things the liberalization of abortion, perhaps do not realize that in this way they are proposing the pursuit of a false peace. The flight from responsibility, which degrades human persons, and even more so the killing of a defenceless and innocent being, will never be able to produce happiness or peace. Indeed how could one claim to bring about peace, the integral development of peoples or even the protection of the environment without defending the life of those who are weakest, beginning with the unborn. Every offence against life, especially at its beginning, inevitably causes irreparable damage to development, peace and the environment. Neither is it just to introduce surreptitiously into legislation false rights or freedoms which, on the basis of a reductive and relativistic view of human beings and the clever use of ambiguous expressions aimed at promoting a supposed right to abortion and euthanasia, pose a threat to the fundamental right to life.

There is also a need to acknowledge and promote the natural structure of marriage as the union of a man and a woman in the face of attempts to make it juridically equivalent to radically different types of union; such attempts actually harm and help to destabilize marriage, obscuring its specific nature and its indispensable role in society.

These principles are not truths of faith, nor are they simply a corollary of the right to religious freedom. They are inscribed in human nature itself, accessible to reason and thus common to all humanity. The Church's efforts to promote them are not therefore confessional in character, but addressed to all people, whatever their religious affiliation. Efforts of this kind are all the more necessary the more these principles are denied or misunderstood, since this constitutes

an offence against the truth of the human person, with serious harm to justice and peace.

Consequently, another important way of helping to build peace is for legal systems and the administration of justice to recognize the right to invoke the principle of conscientious objection in the face of laws or government measures that offend against human dignity, such as abortion and euthanasia.

One of the fundamental human rights, also with reference to international peace, is the right of individuals and communities to religious freedom. At this stage in history, it is becoming increasingly important to promote this right not only from the negative point of view, as *freedom from* - for example, obligations or limitations involving the freedom to choose one's religion - but also from the positive point of view, in its various expressions, as *freedom for* - for example, bearing witness to one's religion, making its teachings known, engaging in activities in the educational, benevolent and charitable fields which permit the practice of religious precepts, and existing and acting as social bodies structured in accordance with the proper doctrinal principles and institutional ends of each. Sadly, even in countries of long-standing Christian tradition, instances of religious intolerance are becoming more numerous, especially in relation to Christianity and those who simply wear identifying signs of their religion.

Peacemakers must also bear in mind that, in growing sectors of public opinion, the ideologies of radical liberalism and technocracy are spreading the conviction that economic growth should be pursued even to the detriment of the state's social responsibilities and civil society's networks of solidarity, together with social rights and duties. It should be remembered that these rights and duties are fundamental for the full realization of other rights and duties, starting with those which are civil and political.

One of the social rights and duties most under threat today is the right to work. The reason for this is that labour and the rightful recognition of workers' juridical status are increasingly undervalued, since economic development is thought to depend principally on completely free markets. Labour is thus regarded as a variable dependent on economic and financial mechanisms. In this regard, I would reaffirm that human dignity and economic, social and political factors, demand that we continue "to prioritize the goal of access to steady employment for everyone." If this ambitious goal is to be realized, one prior condition is a fresh outlook on work, based on ethical principles and spiritual values that reinforce the notion of work as a fundamental good for the individual, for the family and for society. Corresponding to this good are a duty and a right that demand courageous new policies of universal employment.

**Building the good of peace through a new model of development and economics**

5. In many quarters it is now recognized that a new model of development is needed, as well as a new approach to the economy. Both integral, sustainable development in solidarity and the common good require a correct scale of goods and values which can be structured with God as the ultimate point of reference. It is not enough to have many different means and choices at one's disposal, however good these may be. Both the wide variety of goods fostering development and the presence of a wide range of choices must be employed against the horizon of a good life, an upright conduct that acknowledges the primacy of the spiritual and the call to work for the common good. Otherwise they lose their real value, and end up becoming new idols.

In order to emerge from the present financial and economic crisis - which has engendered ever greater inequalities - we need people, groups and institutions which will promote life by fostering human creativity, in order to draw from the crisis itself an opportunity for discernment and for a new economic model. The predominant model of recent decades called for seeking maximum profit and consumption, on the basis of an individualistic and selfish mindset, aimed at considering individuals solely in terms of their ability to meet the demands of competitiveness. Yet, from another standpoint, true and lasting success is attained through the gift of ourselves, our intellectual abilities and our entrepreneurial skills, since a "liveable" or truly human economic development requires the principle of gratuitousness as an expression of fraternity and the logic of gift. Concretely in economic activity, peacemakers are those who establish bonds of fairness and reciprocity with their colleagues, workers, clients and consumers. They engage in economic activity for the sake of the common good and they experience this commitment as something transcending their self-interest, for the benefit of present and future generations. Thus they work not only for themselves, but also to ensure for others a future and a dignified employment.

In the economic sector, states in particular need to articulate policies of industrial and agricultural development concerned with social progress and the growth everywhere of constitutional and democratic states. The creation of ethical structures for currency, financial and commercial markets is also fundamental and indispensable; these must be stabilized and better coordinated and controlled so as not to prove harmful to the very poor. With greater resolve than has hitherto been the case, the concern of peacemakers must also focus upon the food crisis, which is graver than the financial crisis. The issue of food security is once more central to the international political agen-

da, as a result of interrelated crises, including sudden shifts in the price of basic foodstuffs, irresponsible behaviour by some economic actors and insufficient control on the part of governments and the international community. To face this crisis, peacemakers are called to work together in a spirit of solidarity, from the local to the international level, with the aim of enabling farmers, especially in small rural holdings, to carry out their activity in a dignified and sustainable way from the social, environmental and economic points of view.

**Education for a culture of peace: the role of the family and institutions**

6. I wish to reaffirm forcefully that the various peacemakers are called to cultivate a passion for the common good of the family and for social justice, and a commitment to effective social education.

No one should ignore or underestimate the decisive role of the family, which is the basic cell of society from the demographic, ethical, pedagogical, economic and political standpoints. The family has a natural vocation to promote life: it accompanies individuals as they mature and it encourages mutual growth and enrichment through caring and sharing. The Christian family in particular serves as a seedbed for personal maturation according to the standards of divine love. The family is one of the indispensable social subjects for the achievement of a culture of peace. The rights of parents and their primary role in the education of their children in the area of morality and religion must be safeguarded. It is in the family that peacemakers, tomorrow's promoters of a culture of life and love, are born and nurtured.

Religious communities are involved in a special way in this immense task of education for peace. The Church believes that she shares in this great responsibility as part of the new evangelization, which is centred on conversion to the truth and love of Christ and, consequently the spiritual and moral rebirth of individuals and societies. Encountering Jesus Christ shapes peacemakers, committing them to fellowship and to overcoming injustice.

Cultural institutions, schools and universities have a special mission of peace. They are called to make a notable contribution not only to the formation of new generations of leaders, but also to the renewal of public institutions, both national and international. They can also contribute to a scientific reflection which will ground economic and financial activities on a solid anthropological and ethical basis. Today's world, especially the world of politics, needs to be sustained by fresh thinking and a new cultural synthesis so as to overcome purely technical approaches and to harmonize the various political currents with a view to the common good. The latter, seen as an ensemble of positive interpersonal and institutional relationships at the service of

the integral growth of individuals and groups, is at the basis of all true education for peace.

**A pedagogy for peacemakers**

7. In the end, we see clearly the need to propose and promote a pedagogy of peace. This calls for a rich interior life, clear and valid moral points of reference, and appropriate attitudes and lifestyles. Acts of peacemaking converge for the achievement of the common good; they create interest in peace and cultivate peace. Thoughts, words and gestures of peace create a mentality and a culture of peace, and a respectful, honest and cordial atmosphere. There is a need, then, to teach people to love one another, to cultivate peace and to live with good will rather than mere tolerance. A fundamental encouragement to this is "to say no to revenge, to recognize injustices, to accept apologies without looking for them, and finally, to forgive", in such a way that mistakes and offences can be acknowledged in truth, so as to move forward together towards reconciliation. This requires the growth of a pedagogy of pardon. Evil is in fact overcome by good, and justice is to be sought in imitating God the Father who loves all his children (cf. Mt 5:21-48). This is a slow process, for it presupposes a spiritual evolution, an education in lofty values, a new vision of human history. There is a need to renounce that false peace promised by the idols of this world along with the dangers which accompany it, that false peace which dulls consciences, which leads to self-absorption, to a withered existence lived in indifference. The pedagogy of peace, on the other hand, implies activity, compassion, solidarity, courage and perseverance.

Jesus embodied all these attitudes in his own life, even to the complete gift of himself, even to "losing his life" (cf. Mt 10:39; Lk 17:33; Jn 12:25). He promises his disciples that sooner or later they will make the extraordinary discovery to which I originally alluded, namely that God is in the world, the God of Jesus, fully on the side of man. Here I would recall the prayer asking God to make us instruments of his peace, to be able to bring his love wherever there is hatred, his mercy wherever there is hurt, and true faith wherever there is doubt. For our part, let us join Blessed John XXIII in asking God to enlighten all leaders so that, besides caring for the proper material welfare of their peoples, they may secure for them the precious gift of peace, break down the walls which divide them, strengthen the bonds of mutual love, grow in understanding, and pardon those who have done them wrong; in this way, by his power and inspiration all the peoples of the earth will experience fraternity, and the peace for which they long will ever flourish and reign among them.

With this prayer I express my hope that all will be true peacemakers, so that the city of man may grow in fraternal harmony, prosperity and peace.

From the Vatican, 8 December 2012



# Mary, the second Eve most Faithful

As the Holy Father Pope Benedict XIV announces the 'Year of Faith', the Holy Mother Church looks for the ways and means for the new evangelization, especially within the Church itself. In the Bible there is only one person who lived her life as a witness of great faith in the Lord, even at the point of her son's death; she is none other than Mother Mary.

There are many questions, discussions, and debates among theologians regarding the role of Mary in the Holy Scriptures and her role in human salvation. People from various denominations have challenged Catholics about this very topic. Among Catholics, there is even a lack of knowledge with regard to Mother Mary and her role in God's plan of human salvation.

Referring (Gen. 3:14-16) about the fall of human beings, describes God's curse on the serpent and God's sentence upon the woman. However, God did not stop at the sentence; rather, He promised the first parents that all of humanity would be saved from the bondage of evil through a Redeemer who is the seed of the woman. Interestingly, (Gen. 3:15) is considered to be the first prophecy about human salvation. It also foreshadows the role of Mary within human salvation; the Second Vatican Council says, 'she is already prophetically foreshadowed in that promise made to our first parents after their fall into sin' (cf. Gen. 3:15).

In Johanne and Lucan accounts, as Rene Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary*, explains: "If Christ is seen inaugurating a new creation, Mary appears at this origin of salvation in a place corresponding to that of Eve." The Johanne account explains that at the episode of Cana and at the last hour of Jesus on the cross, Jesus addresses Mary as "woman" (Jn 19:26) which directs the reader back to (Gen. 3: 15); moreover the Johanne account reflects that "Mary is the one who in the new creation begun at the coming of the Word has a role analogous to that of Eve." In his commentary on Mother Mary in (Gal. 4: 4) and (Rom 1:2-3,) St. Augustine explains that "Mary was predestined and created to be the Mother of Jesus: He made a Mother for Himself when He was with the Father." Rom. 8:29) explains that Mary is a virgin who conceives and bears her Son through a miracle, and her Son Jesus is the Head of the Mystical Body, the "firstborn among many brethren." The comparison between (Gen.3:15) and (Rev. 12:9, 13 and 17) is highlighted by many theologians. These passages point to how Mary becomes the mother of Christ and the mother of the Disciples of Christ, "the rest of her children (Rev. 12:17)," as well as the battle between the serpent against "the woman and her children" (Rev.12:9ff). The understanding of the parallels and contra-

The Church Fathers reflect on Mary as the turning point of human salvation, from whom God gave the gift of salvation to human beings.

dictions between Eve and Mary is vital to note when examining human salvation in the Bible.

The Church Fathers and theologians from both the scholastic and contemporary periods have reflected upon the role of Mary as the New Eve. The Marian lover Pope John Paul II writes that "Mary is the first woman because she is the 'New Eve' ... true mother of living." Moreover, the encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II on Mary (*Redemptoris Mater*) starts with the affirmation of Mary in the plan of human salvation: "The Mother of the Redeemer has a precise place in the plan of salvation, for 'when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.'" Ugo Vanni states that "as far as the parallel Eve "Mary is considered, *Redemptoris Mater* presents Mary as the antithesis of Eve not only from a functional point of view but also in her personal profile." Mary is portrayed in the ancient and modern theological sources as the New Eve in the plan of human salvation.



The Church Fathers reflect on Mary as the turning point of human salvation, from whom God gave the gift of salvation to human beings. The twentieth century biblical scholar Scott Hahn explains that "the new covenant, borne into the world by the Blessed Virgin Mary, has made all the difference in [human] lives." Irenaeus depicts Mary as the "cause of salvation." In the work *Carmen paschale*, Caelius Sedulius (d. Ca. 440-450) reflects that Mary "compensates for the old Eve's offense," explaining the role of Mary in the work of salvation: "we are the blind offspring of the children of pitiful Eve, bringing with us the shadows born of age-old error. But when God designed to assume the mortal form of a human nature, then came forth from the Virgin a world of salvation." As Gary A. Anderson in his work *The Genesis of perfection* describes, "Eve is not so much the villain but the necessary counterpoint to

Bro. Shanaka Mendis  
2nd year Theology

a 'Second Eve,' the source of salvation." Moreover, St. Irenaeus observes that "[t]he knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; for what Eve bound by her unbelief, Mary loosed by her faith."

Even today the *Nicene Creed* is a reminder of Mary's active role in salvation as was foretold in Genesis. "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven. And was incarnate of the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary and was made man". The Cappadocian Fathers explain the notions of "*Christokos*" and "*Theotokos*" in the *Nicene Creed*. According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, these two natures were inseparably united in the womb of Mother Mary. In conclusion, the *Nicene Creed* solidifies the faith and doctrine of the Church on Mother Mary.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (487-511) affirms the role of Mary in human salvation: she "co-operated through free faith and obedience in human salvation" and "[b]y her obedience she became the new Eve, mother of the living." The faith of Roman Catholicism with regard to Mother Mary is professed in the symbol or creed: "conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary ..." Therefore, the creed also testifies that Mary, as the New Eve, became the instrument of God to bring salvation to the entire human race.

In this 'Year of Faith,' as the people of the new evangelization, every Catholic must pray to Mary, Mother of God, to strengthen our faith and draw close our broken hearts to the Sacred Heart of Christ through her Immaculate Heart.

"Loving Mother of the Redeemer, gate of heaven, star of the sea, assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again. To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator!"

(Pope John Paul II - '*Redemptoris Mater*')

## Faculty of Theology Aquinas University College

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The Faculty of Theology, Aquinas University College, Borella will be conducting a series of courses to instill a knowledge of faith amongst the lay faithful in this 'Year of Faith'.

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## A wish for 2013



Thank you Loving Father for another New Year.  
You have gifted your children.  
We accept it with good cheer.  
May this year bring us closer  
To Jesus, Your son,  
To God so Holy, God three in one,  
Jesus said "I am the Truth, the Light and the Way.  
He gave us the Lord's prayer. Our Father we pray  
He gave us new life, and a Mother so dear  
'Hail Full of Grace,' help us on our way.  
He left us His Spirit to be our true guide  
And now loving Father we trustfully pray  
That Peace and God's Love will reign  
In our country so dear  
The home to so many, as we greet the New Year  
That forgetful of race, colour or creed.  
We stand by each other  
In every ones need.  
Gracious Father, dear Jesus, Holy Spirit we pray  
Bless Sri Lanka our homeland, Sri Lanka so dear,  
With love for each other, as united we stand.  
All children of God, may we walk hand in hand.

Clivee Taylor

## 60th Wedding Anniversary



Shelton and Yvonne Fernando

### To our dearest Daddy and Mummy

We can't repay the lessons  
that you taught us when we were small,  
Or give you gift for gift,  
The daily treasures we recall...  
We can't return encouragement,  
and loving words of praise.  
In quite the way you did for us,  
Through all our childhood days.  
But there is one gift we can give,  
It's all the love you've earned.  
For love is what you always taught...  
And love is what we've learned.  
Cheryl, late Charmaine, Channis and Shyami

Sent by: Louis Benedict



# How genuine are we, in wishing each other?

Most of us wish each other the best, but do we try our best to fulfill the wish that we make on others. During this season, the common and simple greeting is to wish each other a happy and a prosperous new year. While wishing so, do we strive our best to make others happy? Do we contribute our might towards the prosperity of another? If we do not, how genuine are we in making a wish of that sort? In fact we only create a wishful anxiety in another, by means of a bogus and superficial wish. We pretend to be cordial and faithful, but we are truly not. Our sentiments are confined to mere hollow and empty words, which carry no weight and have no bearing.

If we are to be sincere in wishing another, we should be more relevant and specific in expressing our sentiments. Let us say that we are to wish a happy and a prosperous new year, to a person who is addicted to alcohol. If he is to take that wish in a literal sense, he would then enjoy prosperity by spending lavishly on alcohol, in seeking happiness. Thus a person of that calibre should be wished in a more sensible and personified manner. "May you get over your

addiction and find happiness in a sober disposition", should be the ideal greeting. If not, in simple terms it could be, "may you be a happy and a prosperous teetotaler." However this type of a wish may embarrass the person concerned to the extent of his sensitivity. Hence such a wish should be made confidentially. Who knows, that wish could echo within him, to challenge him to come out of his addiction.

If a person who is not so straightforward in his dealings, is to be wished a happy and a prosperous new year, it could mean though, that indirectly we endorse his unethical and crooked ways of earning. Thus a person of notorious reputation should be wished in this manner. "May you be honest and sincere in all what you say and do." Such a wish could only be made by an intimate friend, who is exemplarily honest in thought, word and deed. Many may dare not make a wish of that sort, since most of us are fallible and vulnerable towards accusations.

Can a person who has deliberately disregarded attending Holy Mass on Christmas day, be wished a happy Christmas? From where could such a person

derive happiness, other than from the Holy Eucharist celebrated on Christmas day. Thus our wish of happiness towards such a person would mean, proposing outward cosmetic happiness, rather than inward spiritual contentment.

Can a person who has divorced his or her spouse and left the children in the lurch, be wished a happy Christmas? Could such a person find happiness when his or her family is scattered and the children are in tears. Yet if such a person is to be wished happiness and prosperity, he or she could be easily carried away by an exonerated state of mind. A divorcee who is guilty of abandoning ones spouse and children, should be made a contextual wish at Christmas. "May your family be united under one roof, as the Holy Family is in the crib, and may peace prevail over all of you." Such a relevant wish would be genuine and touching. It could be painful and embarrassing too, but yet would be definitely an eye opener, to bring about true peace and happiness. Such a wish all the



same could lead the offender to reconciliation and a compromising settlement, resulting in unity. A superficial wish would be soothing, but it camouflages the reality and only brings forth verbal solace and nothing beyond it.

A person who does not possess anything, can not even give something at all and one who does not practice good characteristics can not wish the same. Thus a contextual wish may be contradictory, if made by a person who carries a social stigma. The one who makes such a bold wish, should be exemplary in character and in-

timately connected with the recipient. Hence everyone prefers to choose the easy and defensive path, in using the common and simple words, to wish each other. The sincerity of it is only known by the parties concerned, but not by the on lookers. Ultimately a wish is reduced to a mere greeting, which only fosters cordiality and nothing beyond it. Pretence may mislead many. A kiss and a hug would be the same, when given by the likes of Judas, the pretentious traitor. After all, only a genuine wish proves ones sincerity. That revelation would dawn, sooner or later.

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## Triumphant St. Lawrence's Convent at the National Productivity Award



St. Lawrence's Convent, Colombo 06 has been awarded with B Grade in the School Sector of the Private and International schools category at the National Productivity Awards 2010/2011, held at the BMICH

on December 4, 2012. The event was organized on a grand scale with the presence of several cabinet ministers and high officials of the Government.

## Draw from the wellsprings of My love, from the inexhaustible fount of My sacred wounds

How rich you are in all your poverty since you are permitted to receive, yes, grace upon grace, from the immeasurable treasury of My Sacred Passion. You may bestow the merits of My redeeming Love upon all mankind, If your mercy and love will only ask this of Me. You may draw water from the wellsprings of My Love, from the inexhaustible fount of My Sacred Wounds and of My Sacred Precious Blood. What priceless riches thus lie open to you. What grace of healing and sanctification for you and for the whole of mankind. Come to the fount of Love, Plunge into the stream of grace. Believe, and entrust everything to Me. Expect all things from Me, all Love, all Mercy How can you be so weak in faith when you stand before My opened Heart? For in it all love flows together and through it the Father chooses to bestow upon you the most glorious revelation of His Love and the fullness of His Mercy and Grace.

*Rienzie Ivan Perera*

## Christmas Carols at Diyalagoda



The Christmas carol service of the Diyalagoda Parish was held in the open air at St. Sebastian's Church premises recently.

The chief guest on this occasion was venerable Rambukwelle Seelaratne Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Maggona Neegrodarama Temple.

This ceremony was organised by Rev. Fr. Thusith Pradeep Fernando and the parish community.

*D. Anselm Fernando*

## Resolution for the New Year - 2013

I will try my best to have	
Good <i>thoughts</i> that lead me to	<i>words,</i>
Good <i>words</i> .....	<i>actions,</i>
Good <i>actions</i> .....	<i>habits,</i>
Good <i>habits</i> .....	<i>character,</i>
Good <i>character</i> .....	<i>personality.</i>

Striving to achieve a good personality, should be my New Year Resolution.

## Writing to the world's best Dad

*Every heart, every sight is a vacuum,  
Every word, every smile is meaningless,  
Every thought, every hope is scattered;  
Without your great heart and those beautiful eyes,  
Without your live words and innocent smile,  
Without your courageous thoughts and worthy hopes  
And it's all a big loss without YOU.*

*The great hand, heart and head you had  
Not bent towards the worthless means of the world,  
But towards the will of Almighty God  
And towards the call of those in need  
Can't be ever replaced,  
But those who follow your steps traced  
Will make symbols of wisdom as you made.*

*You selected the best mom for us.  
Created the best home for us.  
Gave endless love and blessings for us.  
Taught to care and love not for what belongs to us,  
But for the innocent, helpless and needy ones.  
You seem a lot and the world for us,  
And became the best role model for us.*

*Today I'm wordless, but not hopeless.  
Life is not a mess, but feels that God blesses.  
May you enjoy Heavenly Richness  
And be seated among the Angels.  
Our love is forever, deep and endless,  
Our gratitude and honour too are endless;  
For you 'THATHTHI', our Family Shepherd!*

## Be my friend

I feel delighted to call you "My friend"  
Your name is indeed pleasant and calm  
and I like to attach "Your name"  
along 'with mine'....

I admire your ability to create  
and reveal yourself in a wonderful way  
May your vision be fulfilled in my life.  
So that my expectation will be yours.

May my life remained worthy of your stay  
May all my "desires" resemble your love  
Where your "Holy Word" is respected  
and accepted perfectly well.

Let every one have the desire to share  
the wealth, materials, time and talents  
With those who are in need  
Let not others suspect or doubt me.

Let no one get irritated by my action  
If it does happen, you have given me  
A great, generous and "forgiving heart".  
"Heal" all the "hurt" caused by others.

Friend, there are always dangers  
and disasters beyond my limit  
Protect me from all these evils  
For you are "my friend"

*Sr. A. Christina Lourdes (H.F.)*

## Jesus - God's Supreme Gift

A gift priceless by God given  
Is Jesus his only beloved Son  
Salvation eternal God's loving plan  
His love for mankind clearly shown

Jesus embraced loving Father's plan  
Came down on earth and granted  
The gift His Father had destined  
Never did the Son think of turning down

Fulfilled God's plan to save us all  
Sacrificed His life to show His love  
A love which surpasses all other love  
A complete sacrifice offered for us all

What other gift more fitting than this  
Could Almighty God bestow on all of us  
To show immense love He has for us  
Than the Supreme Gift of Jesus His Son

*R.V.A. Navaratne*



What it says ..... in  
the Readings

**We saw his star as it rose and have  
come to do the Lord homage.**  
(Mt. 2:2)

**LITURGICAL CALENDAR YEAR C**  
**6th Jan. - 13th Jan. 2013**

**Sun: THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD**

Is. 60:1-6; Eph. 3: 2-3a,5-6; Mt. 2: 1-12

**Mon: Memorial of St. Raymond of  
Penyafort, Priest**

St. Ramond of Penyafort, 1175-1275, was a very brilliant lawyer when at the age of forty-seven he became a Dominican. Later he became Master General of the Dominicans and Archbishop of Taragona.



**1 Jn. 3: 22-4:6, Mt. 4: 12-17,23-25**

**Tue: 1 Jn. 4: 7-10, Mk. 6: 34-44**

**Wed: 1 Jn. 4: 19 - 5:4; Lk. 4: 14-22a**

**Thu: 1 Jn 4: 19 - 5: 4; Lk. 4: 14-22a**

**Fri: 1 Jn. 5:5-13; Lk. 5: 12-16**

**Sat: 1 Jn. 5:14-21; Jn. 3: 22-30**

**Sun: THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD**

Is. 40:1-5,9-11; Tit 2: 11-14,3:4-7;  
Lk. 3:15-16,21-22

## The Epiphany



### Finding out where Jesus is

#### The quest

Once upon a time, in a far off land deep in shadow, there lived two orphans who were very unhappy living in shadowland. One day they decided to leave their homeland and journey beyond the grey mountains until they could come face to face with the light that makes colours. So while the rest of the country was fast asleep in their grey beds, they packed their few belongings in a knapsack and set off on their quest to discover the light and bring it back to shadowland.

Most of the stories we remember from our own childhood are stories of quests where the hero leaves the world of the familiar and sets out for an unknown country in search of something special or someone special. Many of our great religious stories follow the same pattern — tales of people like Abraham and Moses who leave their homes for unfamiliar places and risk a legion of misfortunes in the hope that they will come to a place of peace and prosperity.

In Matthew's Gospel we have one of the most popular religious quest stories — the wise men who come from the East to seek the Infant king of the Jews. It is a story which has caught the imagination of poets and artists — like T.S. Eliot in his poem, *The Journey of the Magi*:

A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey:  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter.

Gospels of Matthew and Luke contain the infancy narratives. The infancy narratives serve as introductions to their gospels. They also serve as a summary of their respective messages. However in interpreting we must keep in mind one basic rule of interpretation: not 'did this take place or happen' but 'what is its purpose or saving message'. e.g. not did the star appear in the skies but what was its purpose.

#### Gospel of Luke

It is a gospel for the poor and of the poor. In the beatitudes Luke has 'blessed are the poor' whereas Matthew has 'blessed are the poor in spirit'. In Luke most of his parables are regarding the poor and the marginalized: parable of the prodigal son, Zachcheus, the good Samaritan etc.

## The Infancy Narratives

When Jesus was born the good news was given to the shepherds. They were poor and the marginalized in society and religion. They were not able to observe the religious obligations such as fasting, they were presumed to trespass into others property etc. They are the religious people who received the news of the birth of the Saviour. In Luke's Gospel it can be truly said 'he came unto his own and his own received him'. The poor shepherds recognize their Saviour born in poor circumstances.

The message for us is simple: let us also bring joy to the poor in the places where we live.

#### Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel ends with the mandate given to the disciples: 'go and make disciples of all nations' namely: the non-Jews. So in the Infancy Narratives we see the nations in the persons of the Magi coming

to worship the Messiah. The Jews ignore the predictions of the prophets but the Magi accept them. Here it can be said; he came unto his own and his own received him not.

In that culture, when an important person was born celestial phenomena signaled his birth. When Alexander the Great was born and also at the birth of Julius Caesar were celestial phenomena. When Jesus was born a star signaled his birth.

The message for us is that Jesus is for all people. Although he was a Jew, he is the Saviour of all people. Hence it is our Christian obligation to honour and respect all people, irrespective of their caste, colour, race or religion. And also according to the command of Jesus ...to make them the disciples of Jesus.

*Happy Christmas to all.*

**Rev. Fr. Dudley Perera OMI**

## The story of the Magi

The gorgeous story of the Magi or Wisemen as they are sometimes called, is among one of the favorites of the Christian people. It is as colourful as it is rich in its symbolic power and meaning. We really love to hear it and also narrate it to our children who listen to the story with round-eyed wonder. The exotic and the strange character of the story challenges both our faith and imagination.

Undoubtedly it is a marvelous tale highly embellished and garnished with powerful Eastern imagery—kings, gifts, star in the East, dromedaries, caravans and what have you. For the Evangelist Matthew, the three kings represent three groups of people and richly so. The three groups are Outsiders, Seekers and Latecomers. They are still with us today and actually we are them.

They were outsiders. They did not belong. They were not part of the drama of the Nativity of the Lord. They were not Jews. They were citizens of a faraway land. They looked different. Tradition has even made one of them black. However, they brought their unique gifts and they were welcomed by the Lord. We can ask ourselves the intriguing question. Do such outsiders exist today? They surely do. Are they welcomed as the Magi were at that time and place? Sadly, we have to admit that it is not always so. Sri Lanka today in a way can be called a small melting pot that comprises of many ethnic groups, Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Malays and Burghers. It may be a pot but if it is really melting and merging is an entirely new and different question. It is a fact that outsiders always make us uneasy, anxious, nervous, hesitant and even angry. May be silently, we tend to ask the question. What are they doing here in our neck of the woods?. They don't talk like

us. They don't dress like we do. What they eat and the way they break bread and even share their food are different. They look strangely different from us. Their skin colour gives them away. Those eyes! Their attire is starkly different from ours. Who can trust them? They are Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Christians or some other believers. The Magi not only had access to the Lord, even their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were gratefully accepted.

They were seekers. Way back when, I remember a certain member of the clergy in a certain parish was asked to preach at the celebration of this feast which is named 'the feast of the Epiphany. This seeker after the truth began by saying that the beautiful story of the Magi and the star is a myth. The people were thoroughly shocked. He was reprimanded for trying to disturb the simple faith of the people. I thought that even if he did not believe the story, he had no right to upset the minds and the hearts of the people by his personal and erroneous theory. If he couldn't possibly attach credence to this truth, that is well documented in the Scriptures, "The star burned like a flame, pointing the way to God, the King of Kings. The wise men saw the sign and brought their gifts in homage to their great King" (Matthew 2:9-11). It would not have been hypocrisy for him to tell the faithful the story as it is found in the Gospel and explained it's rich symbolism which is as truthful as it is challengingly evocative. There are some Christians who refuse to believe what some good and devoted Catholics accept as truths of our faith. The primacy of the Pope, the rosary, the indulgences, novenas and the apparitions of Our Lady in places like Lourdes and Fatima and so on. Let us charitably call them seekers, like the Magi were.

They were latecomers. They were not there from the beginning. They got into the act later on. They are Johnnies-come-lately. We can call them out of steppers, the oddballs, the different. The so called intellectuals. Those of a different pace and orientation. Those who dance to a different drum beat. They too are accepted. There is room for everybody in the Church. The saints, sinners, the rich, the poor, the educated and the not so smart, the high caste, low caste, those who speak different languages and the culturally diverse. So, here we have the converts who embrace the true faith late in life. The good thieves. The Pauls, the Augustines, the Thomas Mertons, Dorothy Days, Henry Newmans, Malcolm Muggeridges, and the Ronald Knoxes. We too fall into all these three categories. We come from different backgrounds, different cultures, different upbringing, different educational backgrounds, different responsibilities. But on this ancient and glorious feast of the Epiphany of our Blessed Lord, we all come together with the gift of ourselves at the feet of the little Infant of Bethlehem.

We are all seekers. We are all searchers and seekers. Although we may not be fully convinced of so many things, we still seek and diligently search after the truth. We must remain faithfully guided by the shining star of the Church.

We are all latecomers. During this blessed season of the Nativity of the Lord, we may have experienced a spiritual, psychological, emotional and even possibly a physical transformation. Let us continue to live in the brilliant light of his coming with peace, joy and happiness of heart and mind. "O beauty, ever ancient and ever new, late have I loved Thee. Late have I loved Thee."

**Rev. Fr. Paul Fernando**