

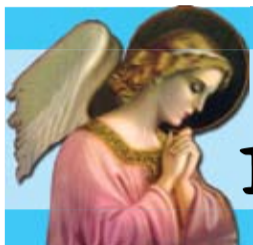


Christmas
Special

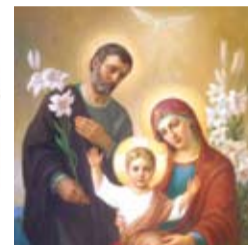
Messenger

SINCE FEB 11, 1869

Sunday, December 22, 2013 Vol 144 No 50 24 Pages Rs: 25.00 Registered as a newspaper



"Gloria in
Excelsis Deo"



HOLY FAMILY

December 29

Message of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka

At Christmas as we celebrate God's entry into human history in the Mystery of Incarnation, we exult in praise and thanksgiving to God Our Father joining with the heavenly hosts. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3: 16). It is the depth of God's love for humankind that we celebrate in Christmas.

Jesus has made it abundantly clear that His coming into our midst is to enable us to share in His divine life. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). He wants us to live our lives as meaningfully as possible here on earth in order to live with Him for all eternity. The celebration of the Mystery of Incarnation opens to us this call to eternity which Jesus offers. Hence, our celebration of Christmas cannot and must not be a mere recalling of His historical birth. For, He wishes to be 'born' in the personal lives of each of us.

The Birth of Jesus brought about a transformation in human life. It is a birth that inaugurates an era of Justice, Peace and Brotherhood. It is the resounding message of the simple birth in a stable in Nazareth. Though we celebrate Christmas in 2013, the world is yet to realise what Jesus brought about with His birth. The Holy Father, Pope Francis, reminds us of this need to transform and transcend the barriers to achieve Justice, Peace and Solidarity among People.

The Holy Father reminds us to

(Contd on Pg. 2) >>>



Painting BY: Marcelline Heenkenda

I Sing of a Maiden

*I sing of a maiden
That is matchless;
King of all kings
For her son she chose.*

*He came all so still
Where his mother was,
As dew in April*

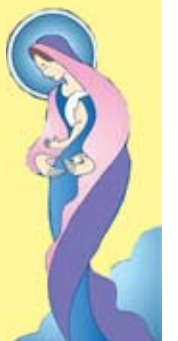
*That falleth on the grass.
He came all so still
To his mother's bower,
As dew in April
That falleth on the flower.*

*He came all so still
where his mother lay,*

*As dew in April
That falleth on the spray.*

*Mother and maiden
Was never none but she;
Well may such a lady
God's mother be.*

Anon





Christmas Midnight Mass

His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith will celebrate Midnight Mass on December 24, at St. Anne's Church, Wattala.

There will be a live telecast of the Holy Mass.



Christmas Carols



Christmas Carols presented by St. Mary's School, Maggona was held at the Rev. Fr. Marcelline Jayakody Memorial Hall recently. The Chief Guest on the occasion was Veteran Singer, Ivor Dennis. **D. Anselm Fernando**

Notice

Colombo Catholic Press will be closed for business from Friday, December 20 to Sunday December 29, 2013

Director



Baratha Community to Celebrate Christmas with Carols

For the second time in recent years, the people of the Baratha Community will gather at the Chapel of St. Joseph's College, Colombo 10, on Saturday December 28, at 6.30 pm, to join in a wonderful carol service.

Organised by the newly formed "Baratha Cultural Fellowship," the event is expected to unite its people, widely dispersed under one banner and re-establish their "Somewhat lost" identity. It will be presided over by Rt. Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Fernando, Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo who will deliver a timely message.

The Service will include carols in Tamil, Sinhala, English and Latin

and will include Scripture Readings.

The organizers invite all past and present Baratha Choristers to assemble at the same venue at 3 pm, on the same day for a final rehearsal just prior to the event proper. It is well known that some eminent singers and musicians in this country come from this race and they will become one in harmony that evening.

It is the earnest endeavour of the organizers to see those Barathas in the Negombo and Mannar regions, possessing cherished histories of their own too join in the carols.

The "Baratha Cultural Fellowship" has

avowed to create conditions to help people develop spiritually in the faith of their fathers which they rightly claim to have been planted by St. Francis Xavier amidst their ancestors living in the South-Eastern coast of India, in the 16th century. Besides, the organisation will also be involved in spreading cultural and social values among all races of this Land.

The people of the Baratha Community as well as the members of their extended families are cordially invited for the event which will be followed by a fellowship.

Francis D'Almeida

New Altar Railing for Uluambalama Church



Rev. Fr. Patrick Perera, Episcopal Vicar, Colombo North recently blessed the newly constructed Altar railing for the sanctuary of the Uluambalama Church, in the Parish of Bolawalana. Associated with him was the Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. Sujeeva Atukorale. **Pic Sugath Palleva**

Message of the .. Contd from Pg. 1

"recover the original freshness of the Gospel" without enclosing Jesus in our "dull categories." As the Universal Shepherd makes a clarion call for a radical renewal in our lives, this Christmas should be a time of soul-searching once again to examine our real closeness to Jesus and the fragrance of the true spirit of the Gospel, which invites us to create a more just, peaceful, and a human society, where human life and human dignity are considered sacred.

Every Christmas urges us to take a very realistic look at the society in which we live. It calls us to pay careful attention to the poor in our midst and be sensitive to the various forms of human sufferings prevailing in our society. Let us be mindful of the disturbing levels of disregard towards the indescribable value of life and the culture of impunity that appears to have overtaken us. While we engage in various forms of charitable activities, Christmas invites us to go still further and be conscious of those things that keep the poor always

marginalized. Pope Francis refers to the structural sin in the latest Apostolic Exhortation. "The Joy of the Gospel." Let us commit ourselves to change all that is not in keeping with God's holy will, thus becoming agents of peace and reconciliation.

Let us be engaged in the task of making the Sri Lankan society a better place for all of us to live. As we give thanks to God for Jesus, let us pray that all of us be given a renewed joy and a rediscovery of Jesus at this Christmas.

We wish all our faithful, our fellow citizens and all men and women of goodwill a Blessed Christmas.

Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith
President,
Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka

Devsritha Valence Mendis
Secretary General,
Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka.

05th December 2013

**Rev. Fr. Edrich Rodrigo, Director,
Colombo Catholic Press**

Editorial Team:

**Rev. Fr. Felician Ranjith Perera, Rev. Fr. Dinesh Fernando
Manohari Samaranayake, Sunanda Stembo
Noeline Nicholas, Shalika Jayamanne**

Wish all our readers a holy and joyous Christmas.

**Our Special Thanks to Mr. Noel Jayamanne and
Mr. Max Jayamanne for their assistance.**

A Green Christmas

St Benedict's College will hold its Annual Carols Programme titled "A Green Christmas" on Sunday, December 22, at St. Lucia's Cathedral, Kothahena, with the presence of Old Ben, Rev. Fr. Sunil Rupasinghe SSS, Provincial Visitor of the Community of the Blessed Sacrament. The service will contain

Secular as well as Seasonal Carols and Music.

The entrance procession at 7.00pm will be led by the Choir of St. Benedict's College, who will continue rendering rare arrangements of traditional Christmas Carols and Songs. The All Island Champion Primary Choir will render Christmas

Songs with choreography and a musical nativity, followed by the inspiring choral music of Choro Benedicte. The acappella group, Voice Print will join the Benedictine Family, to show their loyalty towards their Alma Mater.

Rev. Bro. Janaka Fonseka (FSC)

Balagala Parish clinches Under 16 Prize on Archdiocesan Crib Competition



At the Crib Competition organised by the Faith Animation Mission, Catholic Students' Movement and Jesus Youth, held last week at the premises of Ss. Peter and Paul Church, Ragama, the Altar Servers of the Balagala Parish, secured the 1st place in the Under 16 category. The winners received a cash prize of Rs. 100,000/-

Picture shows winners with Archbishop Emeriti His Grace Nicholas Marcus Fernando, His Grace Oswald Gomis, Rev. Fr. Cecil Joy and Parish Priest Rev. Fr. Jude Raj Fernando.

Thilina Alahakoon

Blood Donation Campaign at Rajagiriya Parish

A record turnout of 165 donors donated blood at the annual Blood Donation Campaign organized by the Joseph Vaz Adult Welfare Society of Rajagiriya Parish which was held at the Parish Hall.

This year the program, held for the 29th successive year, was arranged under the theme, "My Blood For Others" which drew a remarkable response.

Ryle Perera





Church in the Modern World



“Church is a House of Joy”



In his Angelus address on the third Sunday of Advent, Pope Francis emphasized the joy of the Christian message and community.

“The Christian message is called the ‘Gospel’, that is, ‘Good News,’ an announcement of joy for all people; the Church is not a shelter for sad people, the Church is the house of joy!” the Holy Father exclaimed to the crowds. “Christian joy, like hope, has its foundation in the faithfulness of God, in the certainty that He always keeps His promises,” explained the Pontiff.

The Third Sunday of Advent is often referred to by its Latin name, Gaudete Sunday, which indicates that it is a day of ‘rejoicing.’

“In the liturgy, the invitation to rejoice, to arise, resounds repeatedly, because the Lord is near, Christmas is near. Like a mother, the Church encour-

ages us to follow faithfully the spiritual path in order to celebrate the feast of Christmas with renewed exaltation.”

Today is “Bambinelli” Sunday, when children bring their statues of the infant Jesus from their nativity sets at home to be blessed by the Pope. “Dear children, when you pray in front of your manger scene, also remember me as I remember you,” asked Pope Francis.

“May the Virgin Mary help us to hasten our steps toward Bethlehem to meet the Child that is born for us, for the salvation and joy of all men,” he encouraged.

“The joy of the Gospel is not just any joy,” the Pontiff explained. “It is the joy that comes from knowing you are welcomed and loved by God. Those who have encountered Jesus along the road experience in their

hearts a serenity and joy that nothing and no one can deprive them of,” Pope Francis emphasized.

“Our joy is Jesus, his faithful love is inexhaustible!” he exclaimed, taking a moment to stress the loving forgiveness of God, who is always waiting to welcome His children back.

Moreover, when a fellow Christian becomes sad, “we must pray for him, and make him feel the warmth of the community.”

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, “helps us to live the joy of the Gospel in family, at work, in the Parish and in every environment,” he commented.

The Pope thanked them for their work in service of “the dignity of the human person,” and asked for their prayers, and wished them a “happy and holy Christmas.”

'Time' Magazine names Pope Francis 'Person of the Year'

NEW YORK, (UPI) -- Pope Francis, the first Jesuit Pontiff, elected nine months ago, was named *Time* magazine's Person of the Year for 2013, leaving whistleblower Edward Snowden in second place, the magazine revealed.

The 76-year-old Pontiff “took the name of a humble saint and then called for a ‘Church of Healing’.

“The septuagenarian superstar is poised to transform a place that measures change by the century,” the Magazine said.

The Vatican reacted to the news saying that the Pontiff is not looking for fame.

“The Holy Father is not looking to

Happy Birthday, Pope Francis!

Pope Francis celebrated his very first birthday as leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics in the familial setting of his St. Martha residence.

The Pope asked that those who live and work at the residence to join him for the daily 7 a.m. Holy Mass and then had breakfast with them. Four homeless people who live in the Vatican area were also invited to join the Mass and share the break-

fast. One of them even brought his dog.

Earlier in the week, the children and staff of the Vatican's Santa Marta clinic held a birthday party for the Pope, complete with a birthday cake, candles, song and even the gift of a sweater.

The youth of America have sent the Pontiff a 4-foot-tall birthday card bearing the image of Mary under her title ‘Untier of Knots’, signed by 22,000 youths all

around America. The card says, “The youth of America are praying for him on his birthday as well as every day.” The giant card is being shipped to the Holy Father.

Another special birthday surprise for the Pope came in the form of a victory for his favourite soccer club, San Lorenzo de Almagro. Upon being told about their win, Pope Francis had exclaimed, “What a joy!”

become famous or to receive honours. But if the choice of ‘Person of the Year’ helps spread

the message of the gospel - a message of God's love for everyone - he will certainly be happy

about that,” said Vatican spokesman, Father Federico Lombardi. The iconic title goes



each year to the one chosen by prominent US magazine *Time* as the individual who had the most influence on the world and news over the year.

“For pulling the papacy out of the palace and into the streets, for committing the world's largest Church to confronting its deepest

needs and for balancing judgment with mercy, Pope Francis is TIME's 2013 Person of the Year,” as managing editor, Nancy Gibbs, explained the magazine's choice.

“He took the name of a humble saint and then called for a Church of healing.”

SUNDAY PUNCH

by Camillus



Radio Play: Christmas at Bethlehem Inn

A Radio Play titled, “Christmas at Bethlehem Inn,” will be featured on a Special Christmas Edition of Catholic Half Hour, produced by Trevor Ludowyke at 7.00 pm on Tuesday, December 24, over Radio Sri Lanka on 97.4 MHz and 97.6 MHz.



The play relates some of the well-known incidents surrounding the Birth of Jesus as recorded in the infancy narratives in the Gospels from the perspective of the not so hospitable Inn keeper and his family whose lives were never the same thereafter.

Christmas and the Cosmic Christ

Rev. Fr. Mervyn Fernando

For most Christians the external festivities of Christmas - crib-making, decorations, Christmas cards, shopping, carol-singing, cake-making etc. take centre-stage, throwing the real significance of the Incarnation - God become Man, the Divine become human, into the shadows. The literally mind-boggling significance of the event is trivialised. If God became matter in Christ, the whole material cosmos - the heavens and the earth - became incorporated into Christ - divinised.

The true nature of God is laid bare in His self-emptying into the human condition, in order to elevate us into the divine. The liturgical prayer of the Offertory (when water is poured into the wine) tells us that God became man in order that men may become gods. This rich in-depth reality is captured in the figure of the Cosmic Christ. Though it is not very familiar to most Christians today it has its sources in both Old and New Testaments; it flourished in the mystical tradition of the Early Church, as exemplified in Gregory of Nazianzus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others. In the Early Middle Ages the flag-bearer was St. Francis of Assisi. But it got obscured in the late Middle Ages when the open-ended theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, himself a mystic, degenerated into the rigid structures of Scholasticism. There were however a few lone voices such as those of Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich and Angelus Silesius - candles in the darkness. Then the pervasive influence of the Enlightenment and the scientific Rationalism in the 18th and 19th centuries was naturally hostile to any culture of mysticism. Even in biblical studies of that time the pre-occupation was with the quest of the historical Jesus. But providentially the face of the Cosmic Christ has been emerging from obscurity in the latter half of the 20th century, its most articulate voice being that of the scientist-mystic, Teilhard de Chardin.

Cosmic Wisdom

The limitations of a short article like this do not permit a full explication of the sources. However, briefly:

In the Old Testament, the Cosmic Christ was pre-figured as cosmic wisdom. In the Book of Job the question is asked: "Where does wisdom come from?" (Job, 28:12) and in Baruch, wisdom is celebrated as the Divine attribute by which God governs the world (Bar. 3:9-4:4). The Book of Proverbs explicitly personifies that wisdom as follows:

"Yahweh created me when His purpose first unfolded

Before the oldest of his works

From everlasting I was firmly set

From the beginning, before earth came into being

Before the mountains were settled,

Before the hills I came to birth

When he fixed the heavens firm, I was there"

(Prov. 8:22-26)

And in the Book of Sirach:

Alone I encircled the vault of the sky

and I walked on the bottom of the deeps

Over the waves of the sea and over the whole earth

And over every people and nation I have held sway...

From eternity in the beginning, he created me

And for eternity I shall remain (Sir. 24:5-6, 9:26)

The Book of Wisdom tells us that Wisdom "pervades and permeates all things" (8:24); She is "a breath of the power of God" and "a reflection of the eternal light, untar-



nished mirror of God's active power, image of His goodness" (7:25,26).

Coming to the New Testament (passing over other references in the OT), the very explicit statements of the Cosmic Christ are found in the Epistles of St. Paul. I shall cite just two of them:

1. *"He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him were all things created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by his death on the cross"* (Col. 1:15-20).

2. *"For God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of the divine will, according to the divine purpose which God set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph 1:3-4, 9-10)*

The Mystical Dimension

To conclude I shall cite the well-known passage in St. John's Gospel. The Prologue situates Jesus' life and ministry in a cosmological context. It celebrates Christ as the Logos or Word of God, as well as the wisdom of God present with God at the creation of the world. This text is very probably from an early Christian hymn:

"In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God. This Word was with God in the beginning; Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its beginning but through him, all that came to be had life in him, and that light was the light of people, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower" (Jn. 1:1-5).

Even from this brief introduction to the Cosmic Christ it is clear how much our understanding of the Incarnation, of Christ in matter, in Creation, in "the heavens and the earth" can be enlarged, far beyond the Jesus of the Catechism. Religious education of both children and adults still remains, despite some recent cosmetic changes, a matter of the head - cognitive and conceptual (religious knowledge). The mystical dimension, which relates directly to the heart, feelings, imagination, aesthetic perception - all of which are directly conducive to the experience of the Divine, has been pushed to the background. The historical event of the Birth of Jesus opens an all-embracing vista of God's presence and action in the world in cosmic dimensions of space and time, a vista which resonates with the fantastic new discoveries about the Cosmos - its origins, structure, dynamics, etc. and exciting cosmological speculations based on them.

Christmas - the Joy of Ages!

Christmas is, by far, the best time of the year. It is, when over half the world's people slow down the frenetic pace of their hectic lives to enjoy the birthday of God's own Son, Jesus Christ. For several weeks we prepare for His birth and when the day does arrive it fills us with great joy and peace.

Ever since Mary, the "solitary boast of all humanity" (Sir Alfred Tennyson), gave birth to Our Saviour over two millennia ago the world has been transformed. It has gone from a sense of apathy and hopelessness to one filled with true hope and love. This hope encompasses many things, including the promise of eternal life, intimacy and companionship with God our Father, redemption and forgiveness for all the sins we have committed. No greater hope or promise exists. No greater gift has ever been presented to our fallen species.

Saint Francis of Assisi, in all his spiritual wisdom, got it exactly right when he was the first to create a nativity scene in medieval Italy in the 13th century. His desire for intimacy with the Infant Christ at His birth drove the saint to recreate a scene. Similar to Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Saint Francis's yearning to share the very real presence of Christ led him to start a tradition that lasts to this day.

Despite all the negative mutterings and evil actions of an atheistic and wicked world, the triumph of the nativity and of Christmas is everlasting. No evil forces can ever destabilise or replace Christmas. But we, as Christians, need to be ever-vigilant and active to ensure Christmas is kept alive in our hearts and in our community. We need to make sure that we always keep Christ at the centre of Christmas. As they say, "Jesus is the reason for the season."

As we come to the end of this memorable year 2013, a few salient events come to mind. Top on the list would have to be Nelson's Mandela's passing away at the age of 95 years. Here was a man who experienced a Pauline kind of transformation. In his early years Mandela was aggressive and militant. He wanted to destabilise the South African government and its cruel system of apartheid through violence. But, as with Saint Paul, his 27 years in prison (most of them in the notorious Robben Island), Mandela was gradually moulded from a sinner to a saint. Spending essentially a third of a person's life in a prison under harsh conditions would either make or break the spirit. In Mandela's case it did the former. He came out of prison as a forgiving man, refusing to succumb to bitterness and revenge.

Mandela's life stands tall amongst mortals because of his loving nature and symbolic value. For those of us who witnessed the oppressiveness of apartheid, it was hard to imagine that such a horrific system would ever topple. Yet topple it did and in a most dramatic fashion. By the mid-1990s, black, brown, yellow and white people were deemed equal in this new "Rainbow Nation." The Afrikaners had much to answer for and recompense the persecuted masses. But with Mandela's sense of forgiveness and desire to progress his nation, South Africa managed to avoid needless bloodshed. It will take many years to redress the enforced imbalances and injustices meted out to many millions of people. But this can only happen hand-in-hand with Mandela's legacy of peace, love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Past hurts must not lead people to bitterness. The lion and lamb must learn to live together, or together they will perish. Forgiveness is the key.

Another major event this year happened when Pope Francis was elected "Person of the Year." This is great news indeed. Pope Francis's desire to perpetuate the will and character of Christ (and of Saint Francis of Assisi, after whom he has modelled himself) is recognised by all and sundry. The Holy Father's love for the poor, desire to do charity and to invite all God's children to the eternal banquet is the only solution to so many of today's ills.

We too must emulate this great people and open our hearts further during Christmas. We must invite love, peace, joy and charity to the very closed recesses of our hearts. We must open our hearts and doors to the stranger without - to the Christ Who is knocking at our doors. How will you celebrate this Christmas? I hope it is with the Person who is the true reason for this beautiful season.

Christmas is a tribute to Human Dignity

Rev. Fr. Leopold Ratnaskera
OMI

Christmas focuses on the person of Jesus of Nazareth in whom was revealed according to the Christian Faith, the mystery of God Himself. In the light of His face, one beheld the loving and compassionate countenance of God. He who sees me, said He, sees God. Jesus Christ Himself was very sensitive to the sense of humanity in other persons. He made no distinction between persons or individuals, be he a fellow-Jew in His own village or town, or a stranger from gentile country, such as Samaria or Galilee. His disciples were drawn from all classes of society and from every part of the country. There were tax-collectors as well as fishermen from Galilee among His closely chosen few. Though descending from a carpenter's family, He made Himself very familiar with the Galilean sea-side villages whose beaches He came to love and cherish.

Tax collectors who were the much despised lot in Jewish society, sinners condemned by the religious authorities, the lepers who were marginalized and quarantined by civil authority, children and women who had no voice, were all welcome to

His company. He reached out touching the lepers, forgiving the sinners, eating with the publicans and blessing the children with their mothers. He dined both with the rich and the poor but did not hesitate to reprimand those in power and authority for their want of consideration and the sense of justice. King Herod who ruled during His time was blamed for his cunning as a fox and so were the Pharisees, the religious teachers slammed for their hypocrisy. Jesus loved His parents and honoured family life by living subjected to His parents for a long span of thirty years, which scholars identify as the hidden period of His life, just before He appears at the banks of the Jordan River to be baptized by John His cousin. In stepping into the waters of the great Jordan, He identified himself with all his fellow-Jews and sinners.

Dehumanization

Humanity, human dignity and human rights are sensational topics in modern day discussions and dialogues, even in international circles and in political fora. In the midst of vast advances in science and technology accompanied by the onward march of the secular culture, brazen violation of human

"The radical message of Christmas is a clarion call to uphold human dignity and to challenge all dehumanizing social, cultural, economic and political trends we see congealed at the heart of today's social structures and ideologies. Social injustices and political oppressions in contemporary society do lot of harm and hurt what is most noble in mankind, especially of the most weak and vulnerable"



dignity and human rights continue to scar the face of modern civilization. Christianity and its social discourse have taken on these issues in the light of the mystery and teachings of Jesus Christ to whom Christmas really belongs par excellence.

The radical message of Christmas is a clarion call to uphold human dignity and to challenge all dehumanizing social, cultural, economic and political trends we see congealed at the heart of today's social structures and ideologies. Social injustices and political oppressions in contemporary society do lot of harm and hurt what is most noble in mankind, especially of the most weak and vulnerable.

These include youth and the aged about whom the present world seems to care the least. The worship of money has become the greatest source of dehumanization of society and commoditization of man's industry. It is not the worker that matters or counts, but the product of his hands: not the sacredness of his sweat but the commodity that determines the commerce of modern day economic exchanges. The laundering of money has become the most despicable social evil that displaces the

human being who should be center-stage.

God became man, because being human was something worthwhile taking on and assuming. Having become human, God exalted once more, the divine image and likeness by which human beings were adorned at the very dawn of their appearance, when the Creator breathed on them the breath of life, as the Book of Genesis so beautifully puts it. To be human was to be alive! To him was entrusted the oversight and mastery of the earth. Filling the earth with new generations of life and tilling the earth, making it fruitful were in the language of the Bible, the foremost vocation and mission addressed to mankind. However, what we see today is a twisted understanding of this sacred trust. There is manipulation of human life and poisoning of the earth and its environment. Man has gone to alarming unethical extremes in controlling life and abuse of earth's goods and even that of outer space by militarizing it. Weapons of all kinds, conventional as well as nuclear pose unprecedented threats to the very planet itself which is the only home to mankind. The gap between the rich and the poor widens by the day.

A vicious economic system has installed the mammon of iniquity to rule, thus introducing new and more painful forms of social oppression victimizing the weak and the poor. The poor in their many faces carry the anguish and the anxiety of the down-trodden and those in the margins: The farmer, fisherman, craftsman, carpenter, mason and the common labourer.

Star of Human Dignity

Christmas makes the star of human dignity glitter again above us reminding us of the great event that happened in Bethlehem of old, when the Liberator of the oppressed appeared. The kings, the wise men and the shepherds converged on that hallowed spot to adore and worship him. A worker family brought live to us the lesson of human dignity and showed how it was exalted in a tiny helpless Babe who saw the light of day, paradoxically by night. His light shone in the midst of darkness. He was destined to bring human dignity to its zenith and teach men how to love one another as true children of God and be joined to one another in solidarity.

Jesus of Nazareth taught the immense compassion of what it means to come to the aid of those fallen, battered and tortured as in the case of the man who fell a victim to the brigands in the lonely road from Jerusalem to Jericho. He asked His disciples to walk the extra-mile and to turn the other cheek, doing good to those who hurt us and by love conquering hatred. He taught that those who took the sword would perish by the sword and the feet of those blessed who come over the mountains heralding the good news of peace. The ever-touching Sermon on the Mount that enumerated the ranks of those blessed on this earth is a classic in spirituality and social justice. There He gave prominence to those who are poor, victims of injustice and peace-makers. He brought home the age-old wisdom that called for swords to be beaten into plough-shares, spears into pruning hooks and learn no more war.

Only in a non-violent world where man is the main object of concern and beneficiary of all world's dividends, energized by a clear and good conscience, can the blessings of Christmas be received with joy and hope!

The Dream and the Song of a King

At the dawn of a new era -
The first blessed century on earth,
Guided by a Star,
Shining, dimming and overshadowing,
Me and my camel trudging weary miles,
And the Baby Lord yet to be seen!

A gathering of shepherds
Caring, sharing and living,
Keeping their sheep
Far away in fields.

A sudden dream flashed within me -
The apparition of an angel
With good tidings to the shepherds,
"A Saviour is born in David's Town."

My joy scattered as bits of stars,
O'er Bethlehem's skies
And I sang my Song to the air:
"Blessed are they, the poor Shepherds
For they have seen their God."

At my long, long journey,
No human sound around,
Until we, a Trio, the Magi was formed,
At the Sacred Stable,
Making History - the Revelation!

Our crowns down,
Our gifts at His feet,
We fell on our knees
Adoring the long-awaited
King of Kings.

Antonette Patternot

The Nativity Story



The Scriptures and ancient history are the authentic sources that shed some light on the truth but rather the mystery of the Birth of Jesus. History deals with the secular aspects of the Birth of Jesus because cosmic considerations do not influence history. Scripture tells us that it was a birth that was made possible by a God of infinite goodness, power and wisdom. He loved mankind although they became unfortunate victims in a world that became imperfect due to the sin of the first man and woman. It was in these conditions that God predetermined the birth of a Saviour for fallen mankind. (Gen. 3:15)

Religious historians researching the Jewish and Greek writings to get to the root of the expectations of a Saviour had found that the ideal world about which Greek philosophers had spoken paved the way for expecting "an ideal ruler" in the future. The Greek speaking Jews were influenced by the Greek expectations and the prophecies of the Jewish Prophets heightened their hopes for the coming of a Saviour.

The Old Testament tells us that many prophecies were made by God's prophets concerning the Birth of a Saviour. The Jews, however, were a subjugated race throughout their history due to their own weaknesses and lack of forethought. But they lived in hope in the belief that God would one day fulfil His promise of a Saviour for them. Their hopes became a reality with the birth of Jesus,

the Saviour, which put them on the threshold of the New Testament as a fulfilment of their hopes.

In the Book of Isaiah there are two texts that speak of Emmanuel. (Is. 7:14, Is 9:5). Isaiah 7:14 reads: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The Virgin is with child and bears a son and calls his name "Emmanuel," meaning "God with us." As to the significance of the name "Emmanuel," there was no reason to doubt Isaiah's prediction of the birth of a "Son" to serve as a sign because it was a divine prophecy. It has long been the Christian tradition following Matthew's citation of this passage (Mt. 1:23) to consider this as a messianic prophecy.

Isaiah 9:5 reads: "For a child is born to us, as a son is given to us; the royal ornament is laid upon His shoulder, and His name is proclaimed: "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." In the Christian tradition and liturgy, this passage gives an authentic profile of the child to be born and means that authority would rest on His shoulder; He would be remarkable for His wisdom and guidance; a warrior and defender of His people; He would be like God Himself, ever devoted to His people and His reign will bring peace.

The first two chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke contain credible narratives of the birth of Jesus. Luke reiterates the early Christian belief and tradition that Jesus was born without the cause of human intervention. Jesus was conceived incarnate by a virgin

named Mary in a divine and human pre-arrangement. The salutation by the Angel Gabriel and his address to Mary, as a prelude to Jesus' incarnation, have become a part of the basic identity of Mary: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you." It means that she had found favour with God and God Himself was with Her. However, she was troubled on hearing that She would conceive a son, as she was already betrothed to a man named Joseph. Conceiving a child outside wedlock was a grave offence in the conservative Jewish society to which she belonged. But the Angel mitigated Her fear assuring that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit and bear a son who should be named Jesus. Realizing that it was a privilege to serve God's purpose, she was motivated by faith to abide by His will and the "Word was made flesh" in Her womb (Luke 1:38; John 1: 14)

The final answer to the question why Joseph and Mary went to the City of David which was Bethlehem would be that the Saviour was to be born in that City, according to the prophecy of Micah (Mic 5:1). However, the Gospel of Luke narrates that they went to Bethlehem to be enumerated at the census decreed by Rome because Judea where Bethlehem was situated was under Roman rule.

It was a cold night in Bethlehem. Shepherds were camping in the countryside taking turns to watch over flocks which was a means of livelihood for them. Although it was wintry, the region was not beset by



snowfall, but the shepherds had to make adequate arrangements to put up with inclemency in the weather when such conditions prevailed.

At that moment, they were frightened by a sudden bright illumination that emitted from the glow of an apparition of an angel of God who said to them "Don't be afraid; I am there to give you good news of great joy for all the people. Today a Saviour has been born to you in David's town, he is the Messiah and the Lord. Let this be a sign to you; you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (Luke 2: 10-12). This was how God communicated the Good News to the shepherds who believed in Him.

Thereafter the shepherds came hurriedly to the place and found Joseph and Mary with the baby lying in the manger. On seeing them, they related what had been told about the child by the Angel of God. The shepherds then returned giving glory and praise to God for all they had heard and seen, just as the Angel had told them.

E.M. Aldons

Repentance, Forgiveness and Healing

Once there was a woman, who had a number of abortions. She would have not done that, if it wasn't the will of her husband. She knew that it was a grave sin but at the insistence of her husband she had to do so even at the cost of her health. Knowing the gravity of sin, she began to regret, gradually her physical health began to deteriorate, and her mental health too was declining. Even though she wanted to go for Confession she had no strength to do so because she was afraid that the parish priest would chase her out. She thought, she would perish, there was no hope. But fortunately her parish priest came to know about her situation. This good and kind priest, instead of asking her to come to see him, approached her. She burst into tears and narrated her whole story and in fact made a good Confession. Surprising all, she got up robustly. Now she goes everywhere in the world to witness to God's love and at the same time to talk against abortion.

Healing through Repentance

As this woman experienced healing through genuine repentance, we are also invited to experience the same healing through repentance in this Season of Advent. It is indeed a season of grace which facilitates and upholds our conversion and provides viable directions to embrace His divine forgiveness which eventually results in healing. Therefore the key to uphold such a healing is repentance.

In the Gospel of St. Luke 13:5, Jesus tells the Galileans, "If you do not repent, you will perish..." What hindered their repentance was the lack of self-awareness. Thus they accused others to be sinners without turning to themselves. Of course we can perish physically and mentally if we are not aware of our sinfulness, if we do not repent, if we do not turn away from evil, if we do not adhere to inner conversion putting an end to sin. Blessed Pope John Paul II says, "The greatest evil in the 21st century is losing the knowledge of the gravity of sin and relativism

which lead us to compromise with what we have done."

We are oblivious to our own sinfulness. Most of the time we do not like to come to terms with our sinfulness because we cannot afford to see such gravity. Instead, we try to cover up this ugliness with our own busy schedules. That is why we do not like to be silent because it is only in silence we can see the ugliness of our heart (it is only when water is calm, we can see what is underneath).

Today most of us have succumbed to various sicknesses not because of external forces but because we have bottled up our own regrets, mistakes, anger, jealousy, hatred, etc. At times we fail to assimilate that we are suffering just because of these sinful reactions which have got so rooted in our inner selves. These have become a great hindrance for us to be calm, to enjoy peace of mind, to move freely with others. Once we come to know our sins, we will begin to feel like all the other saints that we have withdrawn from the love of God that which makes us cry,

that which makes us to tear our hearts. We have ample examples in the Bible: Mary Magdalene, the repentant thief, and specially the conversion of St. Peter Jesus' look of infinite Mercy drew tears of repentance from Peter which helped him to uphold the threefold affirmation of Love very strongly to the point of his death. It is only through genuine repentance or a contrite heart that we obtain forgiveness from God which heals our internal wounds caused by our own sinful actions, which lead to external healing.

Here we feel the need of a Confession to ask forgiveness from Our Good Lord, who is our Father whom we have hurt by our actions. But as a matter of fact, some are afraid to go for Confession. We think that when we go for Confession the priest will reveal all our sins to others; he will come to know all our mistakes and he will treat us badly or harshly. We have got to remember one important thing; every priest in the world is bound by the law of the Church not to reveal Confessional secrets, otherwise he will be excommunicated (Canon 983,984).

In this world no one is bad but is weakened by

his or her sinfulness. We fall. Whenever we fall remember there is somebody waiting to help us to get up. We should not be afraid. We should not be afraid to go for Confession. Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, is waiting to heal us physically and mentally. Are we resolved to go to Him at the Confessional to be healed by Him, to make ourselves free from all our inner turmoil, to have inner peace, to live joyfully, to live happily?.

So during this season of grace let us turn to Him who is the source of love and forgiveness, who will come to us, to heal us; to heal our wounds caused by our own sinful actions. Therefore with a true contrite heart let us turn to Him, asking His grace and Mercy to lead a life which is pleasing to Him. Let us listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit who is the torch which shows the ugliness of our heart. Then we may be able to prepare ourselves worthily for the Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ during this Christmas.

Bro. Benedict Jayamanna
O.Cist
Cistercian Community,
Ampitiya.

Jeannette Cabraal

Advent the precursor of Christmas as John the Baptist was the precursor of Christ. Advent! Preparing the way for the celebration of the Birth of Christ; just as John the Baptist prepared the way for the Coming of the Messiah exhorting people to turn away from sin as the kingdom of heaven was nigh.

Manifesting himself as an ascetic, with clothes of camel skin and food of locusts and honey, he was the voice crying out in the wilderness for repentance and turning to the Lord. He cleared the way for the coming of the Messiah declaring "He is the one the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loosen," when he was asked if he was the Messiah. So vociferously and eloquently did he proclaim the coming of the Promised One.

So too for us Advent is a preparation for the great coming or the great celebration of the birth of the Messiah.

*'Oh come Divine Messiah ..
The world in silence waits the day.'*

Advent is ushered with the Advent wreath of four candles on the flower entwined candle holder symbolic of the season. During the four Sundays prior to Christmas, one candle is lit each Sunday at the beginning of the Sunday Service.

The first candle stands for John the Baptist; the second symbolizes Bethlehem the city where Christ



was born-the hub of the event. The third for the shepherds to whom legend states the birth was first announced. The fourth for the Star which shone over Bethlehem proclaiming the birth of the Christ Child.

Spiritual Awakening

Advent is a profound reflection of what the Coming of Christ implies. The Christ Child should be welcomed spiritually through penance, - purification, in the river of confession, repentance and prayer. It is a prayerful awaiting; a spiritual awakening. Then only will we be ready to welcome the Messiah truly.

Today more than in any

period in history we need a Second Coming. The world is rife with evil; strife among nations, strife within nations, bitter combat, thieving, blasting massacring, life so cheap, violence abounding. Man's inhumanity to man screams out in deafening tones with hardly a hearing.

Today we need the peace of that holy night. The peace that pervaded that humble stable where the Prince of Peace was born. We need not only peace at large but peace within our own hearts because it is from that focal point that we can radiate peace.

Peace is not in the glamorous advertisements of sundry goods screeching for attention, nor in the

gorgeously dressed shop windows. Certainly not in the insistent tramp of hurrying feet thronging the city. Nor in the gourmet and exotic food and drink at plush hotels with their ambience and music. The world has commercialized this great yet simple birth. It has taken commercial mileage of a profound and sacred event.

Peace is where the crib is, the lowly manger, the lowing cattle. The thought provoking stable is a reminder of the miserable conditions in which a great spectrum of the world's population wallow in.

Goodwill

Today we need to bring back the sanctity into Christmas. Not so much the merry, jolly Christmas but a peaceful meaningful Christmas; sharing the largesse God has given us with the less privileged, not indulging in satiation of our own selves. It is good for us to understand how the other half of the world lives - in our own particular world, in our own country, those who are unaware it is Christmas time at all. Why wait till Christmas? We can start from Advent. Reach out to others in bounty and generosity. Reach out to others in reconciliation and goodwill. Along the path of Advent may we journey on to a meaningful Christmas.

At the Source of all Peace and Goodwill

Then the Angel said to them "Do not be afraid, for behold I bring you tidings of great joy, which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace towards men of goodwill" (Luke 2:14).

Glory to God peace and good will. Those things proclaimed to the shepherds in the hills around Bethlehem, to herald the Birth of Jesus Christ and thus the first Christmas, were rare commodities in those days; over two thousand years later, they are just as rare.

The Year of the Family totters to its ineffectual conclusion amid continuing reports of unspeakable atrocities committed in homes throughout this nation and around the world - Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Syria, Iran, Iraq and elsewhere the killing fields run red with innocent and not-so-innocent blood, often politics involved. Throughout Africa refugees by the millions huddled into camps on foreign ground; famine, the third horseman of the apocalypse lurks over the horizon, every injustice abounds.

Yet the birth, the life, the death and the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ Son of God and Son of Man was ordained by God to bring peace first, by reconciliation through the sacrifice of His Son on the Cross, of mankind with Himself then, by extension of man with man. He came, the Bible says "to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79).

Throughout His ministry He preached the gospel of peace. His invariable greeting was "Peace be with you," His invariable farewell "Go in peace." By obedience, by example, by teaching, by sacrifice, He gave full substance and meaning to the words of the Psalmist, "Depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14).

The Scripture was never far from His lips, His teachings gave new vitality, new purport to their timeless truths. "You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, this is the first commandment,"

Leo Mellawa



He said and the second, is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these" (Luke 10:27).

To the multitudes who surrounded wherever He went, He extended an invitation that still stands today. "Come unto me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt 11:28:29). His teachings put first things first; Glory to God first then peace and goodwill; depart from evil first, then seek peace; look to the light first to be guided into peace; love God first, then your neighbour, come unto me first, then find rest. He knew He was the prince of peace.

In His last discourse with His disciples, just hours before He would confront the hideous torture of death by crucifixion, He told them, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

And even today, amid the counterfeit, the cacophony, the concerns of commercialism, the contrived conviviality of Christmas, the still small voice of God with unquenchable love for mankind never wanes for an instant and whispers down the ages; "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17).

Those who find goodwill find peace!

Advent God sent His only Son



God sent His only Son to us,
To save and free us from our sins,
He did not have a place to rest,
As there was no room in the Inn.

A little manger dark and small,
Was where Our Saviour laid,
He was wrapped up in swaddling clothes
And in the manger lay.

The happy times when Christmas comes,
And with it, brings good cheer,
We must not forget the meaning of Christmas bring smiles to those in need
And loved ones near and dear.

*Wishing you a Blessed
Christmas!*

Shirani David

The Isaiahs of Advent

The Prophet spoke in many voices, and his message was always timely



I saiah lived and spoke God's word as a prophet in Jerusalem more than 700 years before Jesus was born. Many Christians think prophets like Isaiah foretold the future, but that assumption is misleading. It is true that prophets spoke about future consequences for Israel if they continued to disregard the demands of the covenant. But that was a parental role, not necessarily a prophetic one. Their prophetic task was to bring God's word to bear on the present moment in a way that Israel could hear and then make a decision.

Isaiah spoke harsh words of judgment, but he also offered a hopeful vision of a time of peace. Every year during Advent, the Catholic Church turns to those hopeful words of Isaiah to rekindle that vision of peace. This article will look at the Book of Isaiah to help us better hear his message.

Isaiah found himself embroiled in the political future of God's people during the reign of two kings. As a result, he found himself addressing the king on several occasions. On one of those occasions, King Ahaz was preparing for a war he feared he would lose. His only option was to enter into an agreement with Assyria, a superpower at that time, for protection.

Isaiah came to tell him he had another option: Put his trust completely in God. To a seasoned king, the advice was not only naive, it was ludicrous. Isaiah persisted and presented him with a sign from God to make it easier for Ahaz to trust, but he would not listen (Isaiah 7:1-16).

The sign, cited in Isaiah 7:14, was the birth of a child whose name signified the reality King Ahaz chose to ignore: Immanuel ("God is with us"). The words Isaiah spoke had a far deeper implication that would not be apparent until the birth of Jesus, but he was speaking about the possibility of war and King Ahaz's decision to align with Assyria.

Isaiah consistently counseled the king and the people to live by faith and not by foolish actions and reactions. The Hebrew word for "faith" or "belief" is *aman*, which in time became our formal conclusion to our prayers, Amen. But the meaning of the Hebrew word actually encompasses leaning upon someone or something completely, so that if the person or thing collapses, so would I. In Isaiah 7:9 God tells the king, "if you do not lean (on me), you cannot stand."

The words sound paradoxical: If you do not lean, you cannot stand—yet that is the way of faith. Sometimes it requires us to wait patiently and not rush into an action or decision; at other times it calls us to resist second-guessing God's plan for our lives, a plan that may not be immediately evident.

Our fear of waiting makes us impulsive and self-reliant. Learning "to walk in the light of the LORD" (Isaiah 2:5) gives us a sense of direction so we do not stumble from

one foolish decision to the next. By faith, I will come to see what God is doing and what should be my proper response (Isaiah 25:6-10).

People, kings included, have always had a difficult time letting go of their instinctive decisions to act instead of waiting to see what God's plan is. Perhaps that is why the words of this prophet are read each day at Holy Mass in the first week of Advent. They are a strong counteroffensive to the rush, rush, rush mentality of the commercialized version of Christmas.

The words of Isaiah of Jerusalem were preserved by disciples who no doubt continued to reflect on them long after he died. Over the years—indeed, throughout the centuries—many would return to his words and discern meanings applicable to their own time. So although the prophet Isaiah spoke to generations of his time, his words—God's words—would find applications for future generations.

As Jerusalem's kings did not listen to Isaiah or the prophets after him, the kingdom they hoped to save was finally overtaken by another dominant empire in 587 BC. The Temple, built by King Solomon, was destroyed and the city walls torn down; only the poorest of the poor were left to eke out a living in the rubble that remained of Jerusalem. Everyone else was taken captive and forced to make the long journey to Babylon, the capital of the empire, where they lived in ghettos on the fringe of society. The "exile," as it would be called, lasted about fifty years. For many it equated to a lifetime.

Toward the end of the exile, a new prophet brought surprising news: The exile was about to end. Even more surprising, we do not know this prophet's name. He is referred to as **Second Isaiah** because his words were attached to the end of the book of Isaiah of Jerusalem, but these words were spoken about 200 years after Isaiah in the midst of a different situation.

Second Isaiah spoke to individuals who had been in exile so long that they had given up hope of seeing their homeland again. He told them something impossible was about to happen: They would return home. Just as it might seem impossible to imagine a barren desert full of fragrant flowers and running streams, they were going home.

God was preparing the way, but they had to do their part. When things seemed hopeless, they had to "strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm knees that are weak.... Be strong, do not fear" (Isaiah 35:3-4). Just as Isaiah spoke to kings in Jerusalem telling them to be strong in their reliance on God, so too the exiles—200 years later in a different land—were encouraged to be strong and relinquish their fears about the future.

We are under the same mandate today. Whether we are at the center of power or on the margins of society, faith requires that we



"In the prophet Isaiah we have three voices spread over several centuries in which God challenged them and us to walk by faith and to hope in the surprising goodness of God's eternal design for all people in all times"

trust in God's plan, even that which we cannot see.

Although we do not hear it recited in the liturgical readings of Advent, Second Isaiah has another connection with First Isaiah: the introduction of Israel's messiah, a surprising messiah indeed. "For thus says the LORD to his anointed [that is, the messiah], Cyrus, whose right hand I grasp" (Isaiah 45:1). Cyrus was the King of Persia who was preparing to attack the city of Babylon, the last step in dismantling the Babylonian empire.

In 538 BC, Cyrus entered Babylon and issued a decree to let the Jewish exiles return to their homeland, though Judah and Jerusalem were now under Persian control. Cyrus believed that "content" subjects would be less likely to stage a revolt. For Cyrus, it was not compassion for the conditions of the Jews but shrewd politics that sent them home. For the Jews, it was the fulfillment of what seemed to be an impossible dream.

The return trip to Jerusalem was slow and difficult, and what they found when they returned made their hearts sink. For the fifty years

of Babylonian exile, neighbouring nomadic tribes had moved into the land formerly occupied by the Jews. As nomads, they had not cultivated the land or rebuilt any of the cities that had been destroyed. The Jews were forced to deal with two enormous problems: (1) how to get their land back from the tribes claiming it as their own, and (2) how to rebuild everything from the ground up.

The Persian overlords in the area were instructed to help them restart their lives in their homeland, but even powerful Persian backing did not ease the burden of reclaiming and cultivating land that had lain fallow for so long. To compound the problem, the Persian overlords were adamant that, while the Jews could rebuild the capital city's interior, they would not be permitted to rebuild the city's exterior walls. Despite these new realities, the returning Jews began again.

In the task of rebuilding a city, there was considerable pressure to rebuild the Temple. The priests who returned from exile were determined that such a punishment would never happen again. They were convinced that lax attention to the major festivals held at the Temple and the failure to keep the commandments and other regulations of the covenant law caused the exile. For the priests, it was imperative to restart faithful observance of all the major feasts and to put laws into writing so that such a disaster would never happen again.

But another voice, a prophetic voice scholars call **Third Isaiah** (Isaiah 56—66), brought a more inclusive vision of how Israel must live after the exile.

In the only reading from Third Isaiah during Advent (Friday in the third week of Advent), the prophet extends God's word of welcome to groups the priests had forbidden from entering the Temple: "The foreigner joined to the LORD should not say, 'The LORD will surely exclude me from his people'.... Them I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer" (Isaiah 56:3, 7). Third Isaiah concludes by saying, "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.... Others will I gather to them besides those already gathered" (Isaiah 56:7-8).

Jesus would quote this prophet when he went to Jerusalem and cleaned out the Temple precincts.

The Word of God came to the Israelites through the voices of many prophets throughout the centuries. It was each prophet's task to speak what God wanted him to say. In the Prophet Isaiah, we have three voices spread over several centuries in which God challenged them and us to walk by faith and to hope in the surprising goodness of God's eternal design for all people in all times.

And most surprising of all: The Word became flesh in a small forgotten town of Judah, with shepherds and young parents watching this mystery in wonder.

(Courtesy: Liguorian Magazine)

Rich through the Poverty of Jesus



"You are well aware of the generosity which our Lord Jesus Christ had, that, although He was rich, He became poor for your sake, so that you should become rich through His poverty" (2Cor.8:9).

He was rich, but He made Himself poor. For whom? For you and me, for love, yes, His unconditional love...That was not enough for Him, He was born in a stable, because there was "no room in the inn."

People were enjoying, merrymaking. They could not see a poor mother, a humble husband, a pregnant woman riding on an ass. The animals lodging in a stable welcomed Him. Poor shepherds recognised a God. Nature bowed down before Him.

Does not history repeat itself? It is the same today. We have no time, no place for Him. We must run the rat race, to a mass wealth, to please ourselves. Where is it going to end?

Dear Lord, what we want this Christmas is to see you in the poor, in the needy, in the unloved, the unwanted. Make our hearts wide and welcome. Make us see your world with love. Let us find room in our hearts.

No longer should we ignore the lament of a people forsaken. Let us reach out to embrace those we love and want us to care about, dear Lord. Those who know that You are their Saviour.

Let us ponder for a moment on the example of Jesus. By His grace – His kindness or favour that humanity did not deserve and could never earn, Jesus made an amazing sacrifice so that all men could become rich. "He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." – We see the paradox contained in this statement? Jesus "was rich." When was that? Not when He lived in the home of Joseph and Mary. Every indication is that they were not people of great wealth in terms of material riches. When they dedicated Jesus to the Lord, they offered birds instead of a lamb (Luke



2:22-24). Those that could afford it would offer a lamb. Those that could not, offered birds like Joseph and Mary did. When was Christ rich? Not during the years of His preaching. Jesus Himself said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). Before His public ministry He worked as a carpenter (Mark 6:3), and during His short ministry He was dependent upon those that loved Him "and many other women who used their own resources to help Jesus and His disciples" (Luke 8:3). So, when was Our Lord rich? He was wealthy in terms of His relationship with the Father before the foundation of the world. He was and is God.

"He became poor." When? When He came to this world of sorrow and sin, humbling Himself and taking on the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7,8). By coming to this earth, He willingly took a position in the flesh that made Him temporarily lower than the angels (Hebrews 2:9). In the flesh He went through every form of temptation (Hebrews 4:14,15) and, as all humans must, passed through physical death (Hebrews 9:27).

Did Jesus do all of this for self? Did He come to earth for His own personal glory? Jesus did it for someone else. He had others in mind when He temporarily forfeited the glory and riches of heaven and intentionally became poor instead. Just for

whom would He take such a great step?

"And Christ Himself is the means by which our sins are forgiven, and not our sins only, but also the sins of everyone" (1 John 2:2).

That you through His poverty might be rich.(St. Paul). Here again we see the motivation for Our Lord's coming to earth and offering Himself as a sacrifice. All that He did, He did for us. Why? Because He wants us to be rich! The Rich One became the Poor One in order that poor ones might become rich ones. Let that thought sink down in your heart: The Rich One became the Poor One, that poor ones (spiritually bankrupt ones – that is you and me without Jesus!) might be blessed in a spiritual sense. And, what blessings we have in and through our Redeemer! Every one of us that is in the Lord should count him/herself rich because:

"Through Him we receive the benefits of God's rich love"(Eph.2:4).

In Him we are part of the wonderful family of God (1 Timothy 3:15), the great brotherhood of God's people (1 Peter 2:17). Through Him we are rewarded in this life with fathers, mothers, brethren, houses, lands, etc. hundred fold (Mark 10:29). In Him we have all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). Through Him we are people of hope that anticipate an inheritance that is out of this world, reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:3,4). Sometimes, we may wonder how we are going to have enough money to pay our bills and provide for our loved ones. There may never come a time in our whole lives that we will count ourselves as being rich in this world's goods. But if we walk faithfully with the Lord and have Him as our advocate before the Father (1 John 2:1), we are rich indeed!

Thanks be to the Godhead for the wonderful scheme of redemption. Thanks be to the Father for sending His Son to die for our sins. Thanks be to the Son for His willingness to give up His wealthy state in order to make us rich. Thanks be to the Spirit for revealing

the gospel of our salvation (Ephesians 1:13). We are so blessed! And not because we deserve it or because God is in debt to us. By God's grace we are rich through the poverty of Jesus. May we never take for granted all that had to be done and sacrificed in order to make our spiritual wealth in Christ a reality.

Since the Gospel elevates the poor by counting them worthy recipients of God's grace, all Christian giving should likewise promote the dignity of the poor. Paul insisted that the way the collection for the poor was conducted should bring praise to God: "This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God" (2 Cor. 9:12).

The way we give to the poor is as important as what we give:

* Our giving should never make the poor seem inferior—Jesus dignified poverty by living as a poor person, and the poor are often rich in faith. Jesus gave us the example of the widow's mite.

* Our giving should never be condescending as if our wealth were an indication of God's favour—wealth is temporary and not to be trusted; poverty is not necessarily a sign of God's displeasure.

* Our giving should never create dependency, which creates idleness and gives the Gospel a bad name—dependency robs people of their dignity.

* Our giving should be with the kind of love that God has. Agape love considers the other person's best interests. "If I give all I possess to the poor, . . . but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3). Giving without personal involvement can be damaging.

* The most important need that the poor have is the Gospel, which gives them hope and a reason to live and work.

*"A Child is born to us,
A Son is given to us."*

As we rejoice let the poor of Our Heavenly Father too rejoice.

Rev. Sr. Raphael H.F.

The Manger - A Reflection on Luke 2,1-20

In Christmas cribs and cards, we often see a trough. Trough brings us back to those younger days when we worked with troughs as we had to feed the pigs and cattle in our gardens. This is something familiar to us.

It is with this familiarity that we walk to the Manger of the Lord in Bethlehem. There at the Manger of Bethlehem we find a group of visitors who have already come before us. That is the band of shepherds – the lucky ones who received the Good News from the Angel.

Unlike their ancestors, the people of Israel

unfaithful to God; these shepherds have come in haste to the Lord and His Manger. They have reversed the prophecy of Isaiah 1,3 where God laments "The ox knows its owner; and the donkey knows the *phatne* of its lord; but Israel has not known me; my people have not understood me." They, God's people, at last, come to know, understand and recognize their Lord and His manger. Now they accept the salvation offered by God. What do we and the visiting shepherds see in the Manger? Some animal food or water? No, it is a babe, the Babe of Bethlehem, the

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Infant Jesus, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid down by His Mother. So this Child is our food. He in the Manger is the sustenance of the whole world. He is the food of the humanity starving for redemption. Indeed, Jesus sustains the starving humanity – the humanity starving for redemption.

In future, Jesus will say, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you" (Luke 22,19-20). He

will thus give Himself to us as our food. On the Cross, He will accomplish this with His Body broken and Blood shed. The Cross thus becomes the Manger, the place of sustenance.

On Christmas night, we find a manger where Jesus is laid. This manger walks into the Church on the vigil and in a few days, it walks away from the Church. We may see it again only at Christmas of next year. Thus this manger is only a passing reality.

Nevertheless there is a manger that does not pass away. There is a peren-



nial manger that does not walk away from the Church. That is the Altar. On this Altar, the bread and wine are laid down. At the consecration, they become the Body and Blood of the Lord. Jesus comes to be laid down on this Manger, the Altar. Hence let us visit this Manger every Sunday for our sustenance.

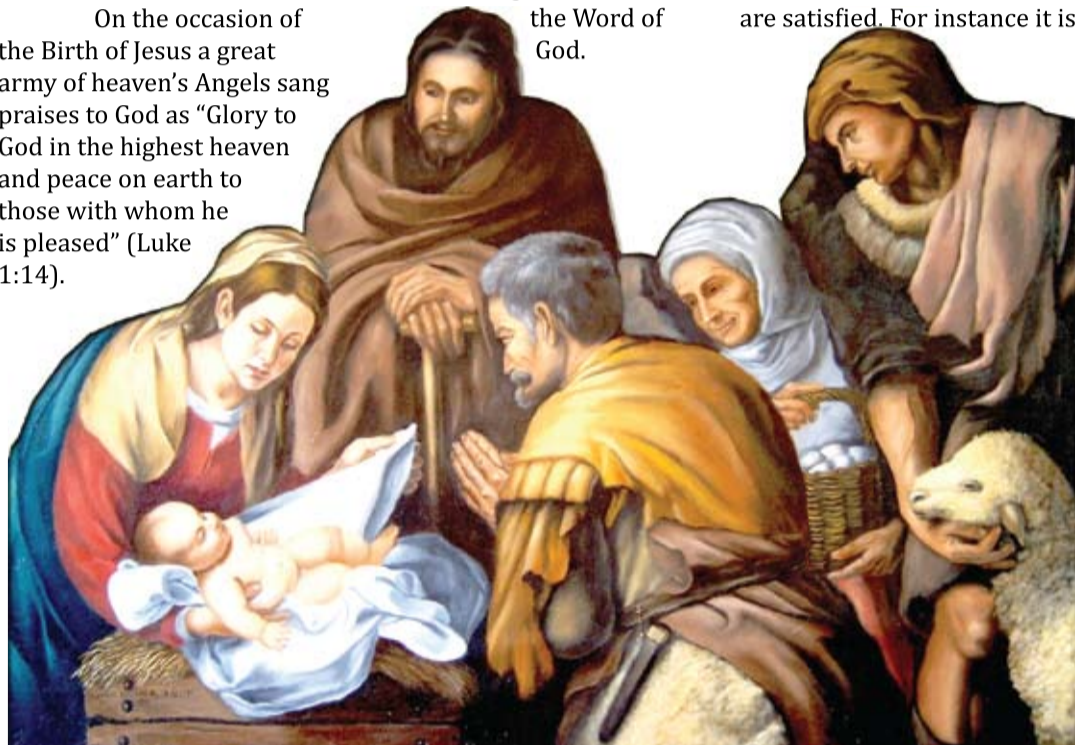
The Christmas Message



Christmas is the Birth of Christ Jesus, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Christ Jesus is the incarnated word of God. That is why we say in the Angelus, "And the Word was made flesh. And dwelt among us" (John 1:1).

The Word of God represents the unconditional love of the eternal Father towards mankind.

On the occasion of the Birth of Jesus a great army of heaven's Angels sang praises to God as "Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 1:14).



Thus the love of God is the peace, God bestowed upon mankind. Jesus says that He came to the world with the peace of God, the Father Almighty. That is why Jesus could say to the apostles, "Peace is what I leave with you. It is my own peace that I give you the Kingdom of Heaven is near" (Mt. 4:7).

The Kingdom of heaven is the regime in which equality, fraternity and justice prevail resulting in true peace. That peace is the fruit of everlasting truth which is the Word of God.

That is why Jesus said to Pilate, "I was born and came into the world for this one purpose to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me" (John 18:37).

To establish peace Jesus began and continued His mission not merely with sermons, teaching and instructions but actually by his work and life example.

Jesus in His work justified that true peace comes when the inward as well as outward necessities are satisfied. For instance it is

quite enough to remind incidents involving the Samaritan woman, the rescue of the woman caught in adultery and the stay of Jesus with Zachaeus in his house with regard to inward necessity.

Likewise the first miracle of Jesus in Cana is the changing of water into wine, feeding of the five thousand men and four thousand men, raising of the widow's son, healing the sick, getting a coin from a fish to pay the tax, are the witnesses for outward necessity.

When Jesus sent seventy-two followers to every town where He would intend to go he advised them to greet the hosts saying peace be with this house and to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God. (Luke 10)

Thus the mission of Jesus was not limited to the teaching, sermon and instruction alone, but open to

Pius Fernando

the outside world as a social service. He always worked and requested to strive for the upliftment of the poor and the needy.

In conclusion it is most fitting to quote the following saying of James in his letter.

"My brothers, what good is it for someone to say that he has faith if his actions do not prove it? Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat, what good is there in your saying to them God bless you! Keep warm and eat well, if you don't give them the necessities of life? So then as the body without the spirit is dead so also faith without action is dead" (James 2:14-17, 26).

The message of Christmas is the peace which will be bestowed through loving the neighbour and supplying their needs.

God's Christmas Gift to all Mankind

Another baby had just been born in Bethlehem, but he was no ordinary child. In fact, the Angel was sent to announce His birth, and a group of lowly shepherds were the first to know that the one born that day was "a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke. 2:11).



It was Good News from heaven. The angel descended from the realm of glory, where God dwells in majesty. The message came not from earth, but from heaven.

It was Good News to the lowly. Whom did God choose to be the recipients of the greatest news? He overlooked kings, influential people and chose a company of plain, uneducated people.

It was Good News for all men. The message to the shepherds was "to all people;" not to Jews only but also to the Gentile world.

It was Good News of great joy. There are messages of death which bring sorrow; there are messages of danger which bring terror and alarm. Here is a message of great joy,

that God has come to earth.

It was good news of salvation. The name 'Saviour' is suggestive. Where there is a Saviour, there must be a salvation. Through Him comes to us salvation from sin, from death, and from Satan.

Yes, we should be thankful for the Coming of Christ and the Good News of Christmas!

Imagine Christmas morning without wrapping paper! The joy would be short-lived, for much of the excitement is the anticipation of finding out what is in the package. Apparently God created us with a "normal" setting that causes us to enjoy the process of discovery, because finding something is often more exciting than having it. That is after all, why we wrap presents.

Many passages in Scripture allude to this concept. In Proverbs we read of wisdom: "Those who seek me diligently will find me." (8:17) And the Prophet Jeremiah wrote of the Lord: "You will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart. (29:13)

God could have revealed all truth to all people at the very beginning of time, but He chose to reveal Himself gradually (1 Cor2:7-8). Per-

Ananda Perera

haps that is because we value things more when we have to search and wait for them.

God is not playing a cruel game of hide-and-seek. He is allowing us to enjoy the process of discovering who he is and what he expects of us. So do not be discouraged over what you do not know about God. Be excited about unwrapping all there is yet to discover.



We unwrap so many Christmas gifts during Christmas time. Some gifts end up inside showcases, some others remain in the package itself, left in a corner as we consider them of little utility value. Do we unwrap the lasting, redeeming Christmas gift, who alone can bring the permanent happiness which is so elusive in our lives? Let us invite Jesus Christ Himself, that precious Christmas gift that everyone thirsts for and longs for.

We will then be no longer in need of any other gift to satiate the thirst for happiness in our lives.

Everyday is Christmas

*Everyday is Christmas,
when you have the kind of mind
that stores up all the goodness
and the sweetness it can find.
When you don't need an occasion,
to spread a bit of cheer,
but just keep on a-giving,
of yourself throughout the year.*

*Everyday is Christmas,
with a gaily wrapped surprise,
when you see the friendship,
in someone else's eyes.
When you try a little harder,
and complain a little less,
holding fast to all the fervour
of the faith that you possess.*

*Everyday is Christmas,
when you've found that you can be
more concerned with words like "you"
and less with "I" and "me."
When it's fun to do a favour,
and to lend a helping hand,
when being understood means less,
than when you understand.*

*Everyday is Christmas,
with a beauty deeply cast,
when you find it doesn't matter,
if you're first or if you're last.
When you can face your conscience,
and be glad of who you are,
Then everyday is Christmas,
with a stable and star.*

- Maureen de Zilwa -

“Come, Delay no Longer”

A Philosophical Wager for Incarnation



Endless Intelligibility of Incarnation

What is not humanly and immediately graspable need to be explored patiently and systematically. One should not pass judgment on matters one does not adequately understand. Without becoming a follower of Christ, one may not be able to grasp the deepest meaning of the mystery of the Incarnation.

Divine Incarnation really happened precisely because it is a mystery. If it were not a mystery, it is not true and if it is not true, then it is only a work of human imagination and fantasy. Incarnation is not an intellectual creation of some brilliant minds of early Catholic Church. Until Saint Paul came on the scene, early Christian movement had no world class intellectuals. Amongst Jesus' earliest followers, there was neither a Plato, nor an Aristotle, nor a Socrates.

Most of the followers of Jesus were ordinary fishermen. But this does not mean that fishermen are not intelligent. Of course, they were intelligent but not professional intellectuals.

Now that is the real credibility of Christianity. No human mind, ingenuity or brilliance could have invented or concocted the doctrine of incarnation. It was revealed to human beings by the Unfathomable Mystery itself. Human beings are not capable of fabricating artificially and superficially the doctrine of incarnation. What is humanly unimaginable can happen

Had it not been revealed, it is humanly impossible to invent anything like incarnation. It may appear illogical, irrational, plain stupid, ridiculous, scandalous, blasphemous, sacrilegious, etc. Nonetheless, none of these intellectual difficulties makes it an impossibility. What is humanly impossible became divinely possible in incarnation.

Through the experiential vision of faith, which is the logic and intelligibility par excellence, one can truly glimpse it. People who lack the panoramic vision of faith doubt incarnation and try to argue that it can never happen.

Lack of faith means a mind with a very limited intelligence or with a very limited range of intellectual comprehension and such people project their limited cognitive comprehensibility onto the way they understand God and argue from there that God can in no way take flesh and come down to us.

Why ever not?

There are no serious arguments against incarnation. Every counter argument ultimately turns out to be serving the cause of incarnation. Every single counter-argument is a pro-argument.

God's spiritual humility humbles us. Humility is never a weakness but always a spiritual strength. The humblest person is the strongest person, the freest person. Incarnation reflects the greatness of our great God. Only a great God can infinitely humble Himself and it also takes a humble person to comprehend the mystery of God's humility. Proud people certainly lack the deep vision of faith and the true intellectual enlightenment.

Freedom of God and His Creativity

God's freedom is reflected through the mystery of incarnation. God is supremely free to create. His incomparable creativity is a reflection of His infinite freedom. Unless one is deeply, totally and profoundly free, one cannot be creative.

Is God really free? Yes, free indeed, even to become one of us, even to take a human body, even to live and move amongst us, even to love and serve us; God is freedom par excellence. God must also become our very freedom and very life. Incarnation is God's freedom revealed and communicated to us through a human body and so now human bodies can live divinely with God's freedom. Now, with the Coming of Christ, divine freedom has become a human heritage. The freedom Christ lived out here on earth reflects the freedom of God. With the love of God, Christ loves

Prof. Anton Meemana

us. With the humility of God, Christ moved amongst us and served us. Incarnation makes it possible for us to live a full life within a limited span of years of one's life. Eternity has entered time. Exteriority and interiority have become one reality now. Eternity and temporality have become intertwined and intermingled.

His Light is Our Delight

He is the light that never dies out. The more he enlightens us, the more he continues to shine. His light is our true delight. He came to make us like Him and we must strive to become like Christ Himself. Then His light will spread and shine in and through us.

Introspection purifies human interiority. We must prepare ourselves internally, interiorly and intrinsically. Every real preparation is spiritual. No interior preparation means no preparation at all. The quality of one's exteriority is a matter of the depth of one's interiority.

Incarnation of God facilitates the deification of human beings. We need God, His help, His mercy, His love, His grace, His forgiveness, his salvation and his clemency. Without God, we are absolutely nothing, not even dust and ashes for dust and ashes also were created by God. Incarnation reminds us of our total dependence on God and God alone.

So what must be our response to divine incarnation? We must cast off sin in order to put on the armour of light and love and welcome Christ, our only Saviour, Lord and King. Once you have Christ as your King, you no longer need any other king.

Taking time out of Christ-

Christmas, that time of year, the time for the glitter and glamour of shopping, new clothes and gifts, a time for family reunions and parties but is this the real significance of the Season of the Birth of Christ?

Family and friends get together and have a lot of fun. Tables laden with delicious food; exquisite decorations and many, many beautifully wrapped gifts, but, the true meaning of the celebration is lost! Today many have taken the CHRIST out of Christmas.

He was born of Mary of Nazareth, a young girl of poor background, and Joseph, a humble and poor carpenter, and was wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger; because there was no room for Him in the inn. Therefore, the hubbub, the commercialism that comes with Christmas leaves me as cold as a long December night.

At this time of festivity we somehow



have no room in our hearts for others as we are so engrossed in our own personal pursuits, the less fortunate are just bystanders since they do not have the means for the good things of life at Christmas.

What we need this season is a change of heart, especially when dealing with the less fortunate, the underprivileged, the have-nots.

Amidst the grandeur associated with Christmas, it would be fitting to contribute something to those who have no way of celebrating Christmas, except with the generous help

from the affluent. So this Christmas can you allow CHRIST into your life?

Christ said, "Whatever you do unto the least of my brethren you do unto Me" (Mt. 25:40).

Recalling the words of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, "At the end of life we will not be judged by how many Diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by the words of Christ, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat, naked and you clothed

me, homeless and you took me in."

Therefore this season, let us turn our hearts and minds to those around us who are less fortunate, and bring a smile to their faces.

May the miracle of Christmas fill your hearts with joy and peace. May your family and loved ones have a Happy and Blessed Christmas.

Rejoice! for CHRIST is the Reason for the Season.

Yes, HE is CHRISTmas.

Bryan Nicholas

The Night the Saviour was born



*Silvery the night, with its mystic light
Angelic sounds resound.*

O'er hill and vale, o'er meadow and plain

An inexplicable aura of tranquility reigns

Peaceful the night, stars shining bright

*Shepherds quake in the misty haze
Lost in wonderment o'er the*

mysterious rays

*Of the tail-star that shines;
Announcing the Birth of the Messiah
Divine.*

While there on a bed of hay

In a humble manger

*The long-awaited, the long-predicted
Messiah,*

The Godhead lay.

Jeannette Cabraal

Significance of Advent and Epiphany

Rev. Fr. Ignatius Senanayake

Certainly, Christmas is one of the decisive Interventions of God in the salvation history. We, unconsciously or consciously, have got used to isolate its very sense and once the season is over or we look at this commemorative event through different coloured glasses for our personal benefits. This isolation may carry perilous potency to conceal the real meaning of Christmas.

When we look at Christmas from a different angle, there are clear indications to say that it has got triangulated with the Season of Advent and the Season of Epiphany. The mass communication and the consumer world so forcefully have divided these three Seasons in our minds, so that we experience an isolation of these Seasons. Because of this isolation, we focus on mere festive arena in and around the feast of Christmas. The spirit of incarnation, the effect of incarnation, the profit of incarnation and the challenge of Incarnation could be clearly seen in all the three events in one single line. Should we allow or sustain any external forces to replace the spirit of this triangulation, and maintain isolation for their personal gain?

New Catechism

Today, a new thinking and a new Catechism is very important for a spiritual up building of our communities. We must have some limitations to the syllabus-based catechisms. In Catechism there should not be any competitive elements but challenging elements instead. It is the duty of the responsible people to go for a new Catechism which imparts the truth about Christmas, to the believers as well as those who respect Christianity. To protect the younger generation from defective views and ways of celebrating Christmas, our hard work and plans to change their minds would be more effective.

It was the tradition of the Israelites, when they gathered annually for the Passover meal, the head of the family used to recall the experience of their ancestors, and how God took the initiative to liberate them from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. This family-based catechism would have surely conveyed the truth about the historical passing over from slavery to true freedom. We need a doable cat-

"Today, a new thinking and a new Catechism is very important for a spiritual up-building of our communities. We must have some limitations to the syllabus-based Catechisms. In Catechism there should not be any competitive elements but challenging elements instead"

echism of this type combined with Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. We have to create a ritualistic atmosphere in every family starting from the first Sunday of Advent to the feast of Epiphany. For the moment we can call, it the ACE catechism.

Period of Preparation

The word Advent literally means "coming." The period of Advent represents the lengthy period of preparation of Israelites prior to the advent of the Messiah. This preparation was done by the prophetic words. It was a time of waiting and hope. Today the season of Advent for us is a period of preparation to commemorate the Coming of the Messiah in our mortal flesh. Meantime, we also reflect on the Second Coming of the Lord in glory as the Universal Judge. This memorial event and the glorious expectation are providing an opportunity for us to get into a deep faith experience. That is the experience of the Lord's presence "here and now" whenever we come together in His name, whenever we keep His commandments and Words.

This whole process is spiritually intensified when we meet in readings John the Baptist's call for conversion. It is one of the key texts of the season. It invites all of us to the conversion of hearts. The conversion of heart purifies the inner sanctuary of ours and enkindles the hope for Lord's coming in glory, and at the same time our faith is increased in the Lord's Com-

ing, here and now. The book of Hebrews explains how the hope is related to our inner sanctuary. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf... (6:19).

Christmas Joy

Christmas is the memorial event of the coming of the long-awaited Messiah in human form. In fact, it is a joyful event to all of us. We express this joy by our outward activities. At the Birth of the Messiah, an Angel of the Lord said to the shepherds, "I am bringing you Good News of great joy for all the people:" ... And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying ... (Lk 2: 10, 13). Christmas is a time of joy. It is an opportunity for us to praise God for taking the human form for our sake. We should carefully observe whether this praising element is widely present in our celebrations.

The Blessed Mother played a big role at the Birth of the Saviour. The Blessed Mother wrapped the Baby in bands of cloth and placed Him in a manger. Symbolically, Jesus was manifested as the healthiest and purest place to keep food for animals. Mary could have kept the baby for herself and close to her bosom to give warmth. Jesus was born not for herself but for us. Accordingly, our Christmas Joy should be first of all praising God for fulfilling the promise to the people and His incarnation that is the peak of the saving plan.

Feast of Manifestation

The Christmas season continues from the first evening prayer of Christmas to the Sunday after Epiphany, the feast of the Lord's Baptism. We simply call the feast of Epiphany the feast of three Kings. The meaning of it would have been more forceful, if we call it the feast of Manifestation. The Three Wise Men carried home the joy of the Good News. They knelt down joyfully and paid homage to the Good News, They did not want to carry any treasure back home, but joy of Good News. They took the initiative to manifest the Good News to the world. We have to learn a lot from these wise men. Sometimes our positions and titles do not allow us to be human in our dealings. Our positions are not equals to wisdom. Wisdom comes when our positions pave the way to become more human.

A modus operandi to transmit the significance and the relationship among the season of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, to the average people should be our responsibility, apart from our preaching and teaching missions. Some smart and achievable ritual to do at home throughout these seasons may help safeguard the spirituality of it. The world is changing rapidly. Consequently, our value system and morality is challenged. For us it is impossible to ward off or to hang on to this rapid change. To answer any repercussions and balance all the ill-balances, change of heart as well as change of the system is important.

The Real meaning of Christmas

We are all experiencing a period of anxiety, Christmas is fast approaching. On the lips of many the words. "What will I receive? For the worker it is "How many months' bonus will I get? For the young boy or girl it is, "What will Daddy's and Mummy's gift be? Etc. Sad to say, amidst all these pre-verification, we miss the essential question, "What does Christmas really mean to our human family?"

Browsing over the pages of the Psalter, we will surely discover the cliché, "The heavens I have entrusted to the angels, but the earth I have entrusted to man." This entrustment is none other than the power bestowed on our human family to work towards the advancement of the world.

The true meaning of Christmas is God's greatest gift to humanity i.e. the sending of His Son into the world to enable man to perform his utmost in his duty of entrustment of the world.

Making an analysis of "entrustment," we will discover that strict observance of entrustment blossoms into advancement. About fifty years ago the present Queen of England said in her Christmas message to the nation "It is not the gifts, decorations,

Rev. Fr. Ian Joseph Schavanguivel

and tasty eatables that make Christmas meaningful to humanity, It is solely the empowerment the babe born in a stable bestows on our human family for the advancement of the world."

Strolling down memory lane, one will discover that compared to fifty years ago advancement has occurred in every sphere of life. Matters which were unimaginable fifty years ago have become realities. For the Christian mind the words spoken by Her Majesty 50 years ago is perfect sense. However for the non-believing mind the answer for advancement would be CHANCE. Chance is abstract and means nothing, nothing comes from nothing is the appropriate answer to such an idea.

Let us as Christians and members of the human family prepare for the event of Christmas by not counting on our benefits and perks but realising the gift of our Heavenly Father who has sent His Son for the Redemption, sanctification and advancement of the world.

Not Only on Christmas Day

*Lord, this is my prayer
Not only on Christmas Day
But until I see You face to face
May I live my life this way:*

*Like my Risen Saviour
The babe, the child, the Son,
May my life forever speak
Of who You are and all You've done.*

*So while this world rejoices
And celebrates Your birth,
I treasure You, the greatest gift
Unequaled in Your worth.*

Anon

Advent: Season of Hope for Saviour's Arrival



It is Christmas once again! It is the Birth of Jesus Christ. The unique thing about the Birth of Christ was the prophecy made several years before He came into this world in the form of a human, by those who wrote the Scriptures.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1).



Christ was born poor, lived and died a poor man. With centuries rolling by, are we mindful and entertaining joyful thoughts of the Second Coming of Jesus? The first Advent was really a prelude to the certain event. This time it may not be in the form of a helpless babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.

Advent is a season of hope and joy of the Saviour's Coming. To gain an insight into the Christmas mystery, our preparations must not be confined to a purely external and ephemeral one. It must mean acceptance of and hospitality to those whom we see Jesus Christ through faith. Human pride, deceit and arrogance should be eliminated and be humbled. The Lord alone should be exalted on this day. But unfortunately the Christian world today has changed its attitude towards a meaningful Christmas. Christ is no longer the central figure. Christmas has lost its spiritual value. Its true meaning and significance has been forgotten in a commercial world daily turning towards materialistic ideas and secularism.

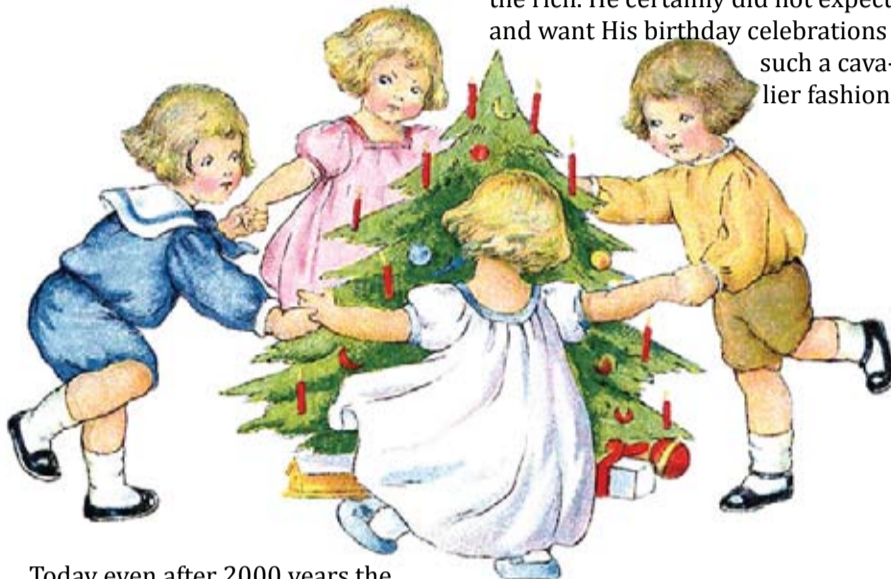
A Continuous Mystery

Anyone who says or thinks that Christmas begins and ends on December 25, is mistaken. Christ is born in us every moment of every day in the inn of our lives. It is a continuous mystery like the life of Christ. Hence let us not forget that everyday is yet another Christmas day to a true Christian. Each day the challenge resounds "Peace on earth to men of good will" (Luke 2:14).



Do we realise that Jesus is no longer a babe of Bethlehem. He is a Living Saviour who can be experienced in our daily lives. We see God the Father through Jesus. We also see an experience of God who bypasses power, prestige, authority, privilege and above all kingship, to be the servant of all. Do we also not see a just, kind, tolerant, compassionate, sympathetic and merciful God who

will have nothing to do with sin or unrighteousness, instead a loving God ready to give us all what He has. Jesus was born not only to reveal God to man but also to redeem and bring about eternal salvation. This was proved on the First Christmas night when the Angels proclaimed "Unto you is born today in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).



Today even after 2000 years the true message of Christmas that God planned and initiated through Jesus Christ to liberate man from the fetters of evil and to ensure peace and freedom has had very little impact. On the contrary there is a vast segment in the society who are disillusioned by the injustice, exploitation and oppression of unfair and unjust sociopolitical and economic systems that have denied many a new life of freedom, dignity and the opportunity to live as useful and responsible members of society. Just take a look at the manner in which Christmas is celebrated by the majority of Christians all over the world. A non Christian is treated to a distasteful opinion and impression of the sacred events and happenings at Christmas and in no way the real cognition of the Birth of a God and any mystical idea of the incarnation of the Godman. Therefore a true Christian's view of God should be that of an intimate and forgiving being, a condition made possible by the Incarnation.



Christmas is a God-given time to think of the lowly, the have-nots and those oppressed and marginalized. People in need are left desolate and abandoned in their hours of crisis and trial. They are completely deserted. Christ said, "The poor you will have with you always" (Mt. 26:11). He was fully aware of the suffering and poverty. Should we not reflect and ponder deeply in what Christ said, at least during Christmas. Unfortunately today there is a coterie of Christians who fail to see reality or face the stark realities that confront

the unfortunate ones in our society. A needy person is not a beggar. Let us lend a helping hand to those who have been less fortunate and ostracised. It is our bounden duty and obligation through noble deed to bring new life and hope for these to live with honour, dignity and self-respect. This is their God-given birthright. By asking people to care, share and give, Christ did not mean from the rich to the rich. He certainly did not expect and want His birthday celebrations in such a cavalier fashion.

Yearning for Peace

Finally on this great day of the Birth of the Prince of Peace let us not forget our own land, where there is unending turmoil, unrest, death and destruction. It is peace that we all yearn for our dear motherland. There cannot be peace without justice, fair play and a spirit of give and take. The country has paid a heavy price in blood. Thousands have been rendered homeless and are refugees in their homeland. Unimaginable destruction has taken place to property and places of worship. It must be remembered that Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic-society where every citizen has the right to live in peace, harmony and freedom with dignity and self-respect. Those who preach and incite hatred and violence are only causing self-destruction to themselves and everything around, them.



The Spirit of Christ should pervade every nook and corner

Francis Vethanayagam J.P

that lasting peace would dawn. It is the ardent hope of everyone that life in a new social order where brotherhood devoid of injustice, greed and hatred will soon dawn in Sri Lanka, a partnership of people to usher peace and harmony in a nation of one people.

A happy, peaceful and blessed Christmas to all!

"The Spirit of Christ should pervade every nook and corner of this country"

Merry Christmas!

Christmas again?

*It is Christmas again
And I rush, I run around,
Doing all I did last year,
All over again!*

*Making the crib, setting the tree,
Cooking and cleaning
Endless tasks, tired limbs,
And still the shopping spree.*

*Within me an echo I hear,
"It has to be done,
It has to be done.
Even better than last year.*

*Soon the 25th is gone,
And all is put away.
And I am left so drained,
So empty, quite forlorn.*

*Nothing happened within me
To cause a similar stirring,
Of thought and prayer and reflection,
Between my God and me.*

*For then, my heart would overflow
With awe and grace and wonder,
Knowing that Christmas is "within,"
Not just an external show.*

*And now, it's Christmas again, 2013,
I am peaceful and prayerful,
Preparing my heart and mind and spirit:
My work "inside" and "within."*

*Remind me Lord, again and again,
That Christmas is a grace-filled time,
A matter for the heart and spirit
That always with me should remain.*

"Yes, it is Christmas every time you smile at your brother and offer him your hand"

- Mother Teresa

Rev. Sr. Cynthia Mendis, PH

Advent and Christmas



Introduction

Advent is a very important season in the liturgical year since it paves the way for the faithful to prepare for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus; COME LORD JESUS, *Maranatha*. Hence it is a time of preparation and an invitation extended to the faithful to be prepared intensely and thereby they would be guided to be obedient to their vocation gifted from the Sacrament of Baptism and the new identity embraced by them would have to be strengthened.

When we focus our attention on the liturgical year, it is obvious that there are two seasons of intense preparation to witness to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. While the Season of Lent leads the faithful to partake actively in the victorious Resurrection of Jesus, Advent as another segment of the liturgical year, invites them to be prepared in order to welcome the Glorious Lord. Therefore though these two seasons of preparation appear in the liturgical year, God Himself out of His abundant love for the human kind paves the way for them to be more and more authentic in their dealings with others and in the process of authenticity to be united with Him eternally.



A short analysis of the season entails with few factors; Advent Wreath, two segments of the season as part 1 and 2, candles/lamps of the wreath and the different colours associated with them and the circle with greenish colour.

The Advent wreath itself is very symbolic in meaning. At first, the four candles of the wreath symbolize the four eras in which God prepared His people through PATRIARCHS (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), JUDGES (Samuel), KINGS (Saul, David and Solomon) and PROPHETS (Amos, Ezekiel. ...). Four eras of preparation are constantly reminded of though John the Baptist is usually known as the forerunner of the Messiah (Heb:1-2).

The role of John the Baptist is the link between the Old and the New Testaments. Even Jesus began His earthly Ministry at the point where John the Baptizer ended the task entrusted to him by God the Father

Thus, the four candles are associated with two colours, whereas 1st, 2nd and 4th weeks are connected with purple and at the beginning of the masses on Sundays, candles in purple are lit inviting the faithful to repent for what they have done, invitation to repent, yet, this is not the nature of repentance highlighted in the Season of Lent. This is to emphasize the fact that the sense of preparation always entails repentance.

The candle in pink colour which is lit in the 3rd week at the beginning of the Sunday Mass reminds them to be happy due to the Birth of Jesus, God in human form. Incarnation is thereby conveyed in this way.



The fifth candle usually in white is a later addition to the wreath to depict the message that the mystery of Incarnation is the presence of LIGHT, "I am the Light of the world," Jesus said. This could be visualized outwardly with bulbs and decoration with light. At this juncture, we can be also reminded about the Pagan Feast of the Unconquered Sun.

The preparation for Christmas really envisages the sense of prayer, meditation and reflection. The question could be always asked WHY DO WE PRAY? Prayer is the weapon of a Christian.

The sense of prayer is being lost in our Christian families unfortunately. Earlier the need for prayer was felt, yet unfortunately, at present, the need is converted to some other alternatives. The television has to a greater extent replaced prayer. Youngsters hardly realise the real meaning in the life of prayer. The recitation of the Rosary seems to be out-dated, thus in the *Marian Year*, it could be promoted even in our Sunday School system, hence, the sense of devotion to the Blessed Mother would be upheld once again. In this particular perspective, the season of Advent is an apt opportune moment to promote the life of prayer in our Catholic families.

The exemplary life of Mother Mary can be placed as a patronage in the Season of Advent. She even at present, teaches us the virtue of humility. "Then Mary said, 'here am I, the servant of Lord; let it be with me according to your word' (Lk.1:38), Hymn of gratefulness gives praise to God ... my spirit rejoices in God my Sav-

our, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant" (Lk.1:47). She is a true mother, at the marriage feast in Cana, she played a great and human role before her son Jesus in asking the favour for the housemates.

Prophesies of Isaiah

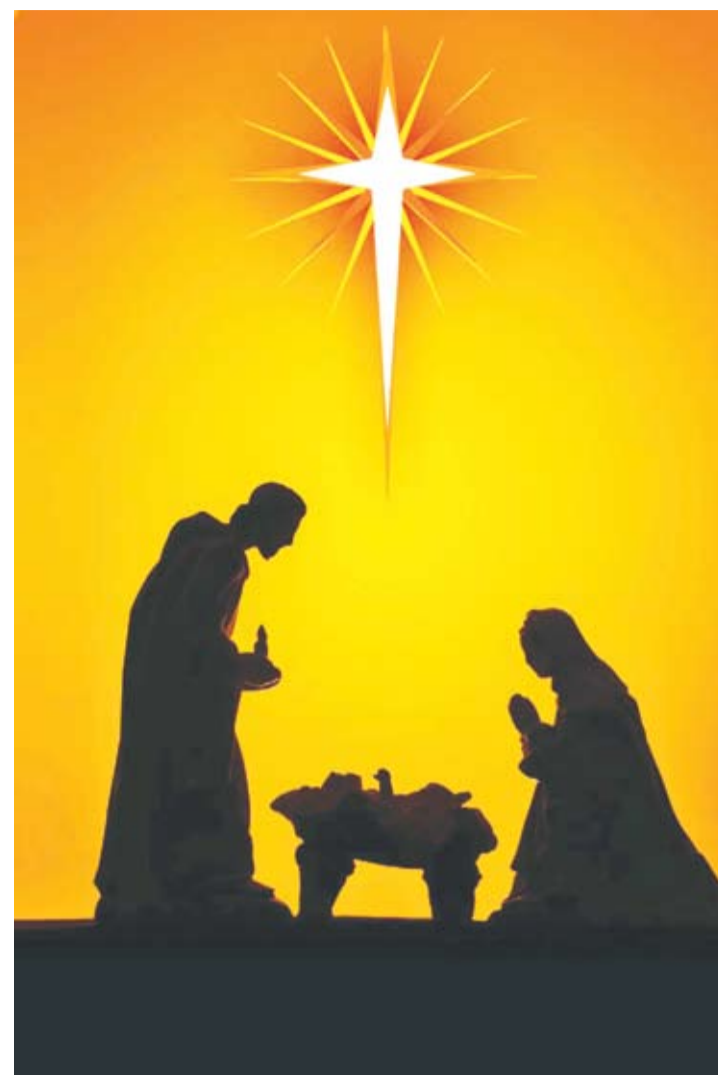
"Prepare the way for the Lord" being the theme for the Second Sunday, has got to touch the hearts of every Christian life. The imagery; shepherd leading his flock, gathering the lambs in his arms and carrying them in his bosom, is a clear indication of God's ever loving nature (Isa. 40:11). It is just like a mother feeding her child with her breast. To really experience God's love, we are to wait in expectation" (2 Peter 3:14).

Most of the Readings taken for our reflections in the season of Advent envisage a great number of prophesies from the prophet Isaiah. He is directly linked with this season. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring the good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Is.61:1-2a). Once again his beautiful imagery of a bride and a bridegroom reveals the virtue of righteousness, peace and salvation. Even St. Paul is in favour of this; "The kingdom of God does not mean food and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom.14:17- 19).



Earthly ministry of Jesus is given for us to meditate. St. John proclaims that the Messiah has come and the time is at hand for a transformation of lives. The light and the darkness taken from the Platonic understanding (dualism), reminds us the proper celebration of Christmas.

Since we have been baptized into the passion, death and the resurrection of Jesus, the Lord, we have to be authentic witnesses in His proclamation. The example set by Jesus is indeed a pointed optimistic challenge for all of us today specially in this FAITH - irritating society. Hence, an invitation is extended to be more and more in touch with the Risen Lord who is powerfully present among us. Prophet Isaiah is presented as another Biblical figure related to the season of Advent.



Rev. Fr. Indra Ratnasiri Fernando
Director,
Archdiocesan Apostolate for Catechetics

MARANATHA, Come Lord Jesus ... is joyfully sung in the Christian and the Catholic churches.



We wait in joy, even the Gospel texts given to be reflected upon vividly explain about the meaning of this season, thus the necessity of being vigilant is pointed out as a sense of preparation. Since we are not aware of the hour, day and time, we are constantly instructed to wait as the servant awakes for his master. The sole purpose of the Christian life is to be united with God the Father eternally. This purpose is again and again reminded to us in this season in a thorough way. As the new liturgical year begins with the dawn of Advent in the month of November, the attention of the faithful is focused on the departed brothers and sisters, yet their prayers are offered for them in a special way.

The Season helps us to deepen our faith. Abraham is placed as the model for faith. St. Matthew begins the Gospel with the genealogy of Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham, even Jews and Muslims address him 'our holy father'. Faith for him was hope and trust in the Lord. Even though the promise was made by Yahweh, "I will make

of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" (Gen.12:12). It seemed surpassing even the human possibility since he was an old man, husband of a sterile wife, yet, he stands as the head of the figure who helped in preparing for the coming of the Messiah, hence he becomes a man for our time too.



The life of Simeon is presented as an exemplary role especially in the season of Advent. 'In one's old age, one can meet Jesus and rejoice in him, we tend to think of discipleship as being for the young. John and Andrew who leave John the Baptist for Jesus are just lads. It is the rich young man who comes to Jesus and on whom Jesus looks with love (Mt. 10:21).

Conclusion

Let us make a sincere attempt to make this Season of Advent very meaningful in order to welcome the Glorious Lord into our midst. Let not this period be another segment of the liturgical year. In this perspective, ADVENT as a very important season of preparation invites us openly to be united with one another in the Christian brotherhood.

The School Christmas Pageant

A Short Story

By Chandrani Warnasuriya



Ronald Ratnayake was new to the Staff. He was appointed the English teacher for the Middle school, and was a Catholic. It was a private school and the children were fairly fluent in English. When he went to the Staff Meeting that November afternoon, he had no idea he would have to be in charge of the Christmas play at the year-end concert in school.

"Who will volunteer to do the Christmas play," Mr. Ivan Gunewardane, the Principal, a tall and hefty, middle-aged gentleman lifted his eye glasses off and looked around inquiringly.

There was dead silence, as the majority of the staff were non-Christians, and did not wish to speak. Finally the Principal broke the silence, and in his characteristic gentle but straight forward voice, looked at Ronald and exclaimed, "Ronald, would you please like to take over.... The other Christian ladies and gentlemen on the staff could help and others willing to, may do so."

A Task

Ronald could not believe such a task would fall on him, as he was new to working with Middle School students. Many questions came crowding in his mind. What about the choice of characters? How will the non-Christians respond? His class was a mixed group of Christians and non-Christians and the Christians were few. Ronald did not wish to leave out anybody in his 8th Grade class of twenty-five students. He shrank back, and wished to refuse. Still, this was the Principal's first request and he did not wish to annoy him.

He thought about the play. All that Ronald wished was that the children may experience the spirit of Christmas, the glory, the simplicity, the mystery, and the beauty of the Christmas story, and the love, joy and peace of Christmas.

Ronald started by reading the biblical story of the birth of Christ. He got the children to sit round and listen to the story intently. "And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that the world would be taxed." He also read about Joseph and Mary, and

"Mary being with child," and when they arrived in Bethlehem, there was no room in the Inn. So Mary gave birth to her child, "wrapped him in swaddling clothes," and laid him in a manger.

He also read about the shepherds keeping watch, and how the angel of the Lord appeared to them and they were very much afraid. But the angel told them not to fear, but rejoice, because born to them in the City of David was their Saviour, "which is Christ the Lord." That the angels came in numbers and proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will to men." He also read about the Three Wise Men, who followed a Star in the Eastern sky and brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

As usual discussions followed as 8th Graders would do. Ronald was surprised to note how the non-Christian students responded. Some of the students had heard the story for the first time. They were keen to know more about Caesar Augustus. Why there was no room for Mary in the Inn, "swaddling clothes," and so on. The students were only very keen to take part, and be on stage.

The Middle school curriculum supervisor, a tensed middle-aged lady and a Christian advised him to write out the script and have the children memorise it, so that they would not miss the biblical language. Ronald however decided otherwise. As a budding young professional, he did not wish to be told how to teach. He decided to have a pantomime of the Christmas story with narration and minimum of dialogue as some of the actors would be non-Christians. He wished the children to speak naturally, as they learnt about the Christmas story, and was certain that if they practised long enough, though the biblical language would be altered here and there by the children it would sound more natural than mechanizing a script.

A few weeks before the program all classes got busy, preparing for their items, and the time came for the choice of characters for Ronald's play. Ronald decided to let the children choose among themselves for the speaking roles.

For Mary they selected a shy and somewhat silent girl, but beautiful. Her name was Grace. There was no argu-

ment about the choice of Joseph. It was big Chrisan. He was the tallest and the most talkative. Though not very good at his Math and Social studies he performed well at games and wished to be a leading basketball player when he grew up. Angels, shepherds and the Three Wise Men were also selected. And the students were all excited and highly enthusiastic, taking part in a play, and regardless of differences, only showed their keenness to be on stage. Still, to be on the safe side, Ronald requested the children to get permission letters from their parents to take part in a Christmas play. He even silently prayed he would get their approval, and was overjoyed when there was no objection.

Ms. Hilda and Ms. Ranjini, were an enjoyable two. They did a pretty good job in modeling the costumes of the angels and shepherd, and the Wise Men. Somebody suggested, "Let's not have animals." But Ronald questioned for himself, "How could one imagine a stable scene without animals.?"

The two ladies were back again, quickly cutting and pasting, pieces of cloth and paper and hard board, figuring out the cows, sheep and goats and the children peeking out of the many holes in them, one could not tell a sheep from a goat.

The Art master Mr. Ranasinghe, helped with the stage settings. With the curtain already on the stage, he set two stuffed flour sacks as seats for Joseph and Mary, but no cradle. The blue flood lights he said would cover up many sins and hide the missing items.

Ronald rehearsed hard with his class for weeks, making the children learn their entrances, exits, lines, cues and others. He proceeded as if they were preparing for a Broadway production. Getting Chrisan to stop bouncing and Mary to speak a little louder and the Wise Men to walk balanced, lest they bang on the orchestra, and the animals to Moo and Baa at the right time, were problems to be handled successfully.

The Big Day

Finally came the afternoon of the performance. Parents were assigned the seven rows behind the Principal and the staff in the auditorium. The seats came to be fully occupied. The students filed in and occupied their sections.



It was time for the Principal to welcome the guests for the year-end concert.

At back stage Ronald was busy with his helpers trying his best to keep the children quiet. After the Principal delivered his address, the orchestra started playing "Silent Night," sung by the neighbouring church choir. After the finishing lines Mr. Ranasinghe plunged into the stage to switch on the blue Flood Lights and Ronald and his helpers hustled the children into their places.

The curtain opened disclosing Mary and Joseph seated on their flour sacks and leaning on each other. The animals uttered their cherubic sounds. Some forgot their Moos and Baas! One child took one look at the audience, and took off the side wings on the stage.

The big angel appeared, her wings almost dropping off, but remained steady and carried baby Jesus. She placed the baby on the straw, at the feet of Mary and announced, "And it came to pass...." She got to Caesar Augustus and faltered, but then picked up and went on boldly...."wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger."

At this point Chrisan awakened. He yawned and looked down in surprise. Forgetting what he had rehearsed, he shook Mary rather roughly on the shoulder and said, "Mary! Mary!" he shouted, "Wake up and see what you had in the night!"

At this point there were several laughs and gasps, and spontaneous applause from the audience. The program ended. No Wise men banged on the orchestra and the shepherds stayed serene and even the child who took off was back on stage.

When the program was over, the children excitedly scampered out of their costumes, ready for the year-

end holiday. They hugged and thanked Ronald, and happily disappeared to the excited and smiling crowd outside. Just then the Principal suddenly appeared and told Ronald, "When you have finished over here, I'd like to see you in my office." Ronald's face went flat, for he feared the worst. But then Chrisan's father came over and congratulating him said, "This is the best Christmas play I've ever seen. My son was wonderful, thank you for getting him on stage," he said, and shook Ronald's hand in a very happy mood.

The Curtain Call

Ronald shuddered at the Principal's request, "That's it! This is going to be my last day at school, I'm going to be fired," he thought. "I should have better listened to the Middle School supervisor's advice, rather than go in for magic." He blamed himself.

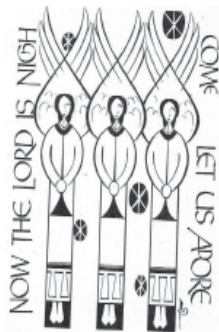
As Ronald entered the Principal's office, he looked even more bigger behind his desk, "It was beautiful Ronald and so were you," he said, with a broad smile. "Thank you for doing a great job of work. It was a lot of fun, and I could not have captured the beauty and the simplicity of the Christmas story better and wasn't Chrisan a wonder?" The principal rose and coming forward congratulated Ronald and said, "You will make an exceptional teacher one day!" Ronald stammered a bewildered thank you, and wishing the Principal a great holiday started out of the office.

He met Chrisan in the hall who was exceedingly happy and told Ronald he had decided not to be a basketball player but a good actor one day.

For Ronald however, what he was exceptionally happy about was the thought, that the children had truly experienced the spirit of Christmas, of love, joy and peace.



Christmas during Blessed Joseph Vaz' time



The Virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us.'

(Mt. 1:23)

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Response: Come and visit your people.

Our saving God hears the cries of His people. Let us entrust to Him all our longings and all the people dear to us and to Him. Let us pray to the Lord.

Response: Come and visit your people.

For light and wisdom for the leaders of nations: That all may have a fair share in the gifts of God's creation. Let us pray to the Lord.

Response: Come and visit your people.

For parents who expect a child: That they may shelter the new life with warmth and experience and pass on God's love. Let us pray to the Lord.

Response: Come and visit your people.

And for ourselves in our Christian communities: That we may be gentle to one another as God is good and gentle to us. Let us pray to the Lord.

Response: Come and visit your people.

LITURGICAL CALENDAR YEAR A
22nd Dec. - 5th Jan. 2014

Sun:	4th Sunday of Advent Is 7: 10-14; Rom 1:1-7; Mt 1: 18-24
Mon:	Memorial of St. John of Kandy, Priest Mal 3:1-4, 23,24; Lk. 1: 23,24
Tue:	2 Sam 7:1-5,8-12,4,16; Lk. 1:67-79
Wed:	Is 52:7-10; Heb. 1: 106; Jn 1: 1-18
Thu:	Feast of St. Stephen, Protomartyr Acts 6:8-10, 7:54-59; Mt. 10: 17-22
Fri:	Feast of St. John, Apostle & Evangelist 1 Jn 1:1-4; Jn.20:2-8
Sat:	Feast of Holy Innocents, Martyrs 1 Jn 1:5-2:2; Mt. 2: 13-18
Sun:	Feast of Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph Sir 3:3-7, 14-17; Col 3:12-21; Mt. 2:13-15, 19-23
Mon:	1 Jn 2:12-17; Lk 2: 36-40
Tue:	1 Jn 2:18-21; Jn 1: 1-18
Wed:	Feast of Mary the Holy Mother of God Num 6:22-27; Gal 4:4-7; Lk 2:16-21
Thu:	Memorial of Basil the Great & Gregory Nazianzen 1 Jn 2: 22-28; Jn 1: 19-28
Fri:	1 Jn 2:29-36; Jn 1:29-34
Sat:	1 Jn 3: 7-10; Jn 1:35-42
Sun:	The Epiphany of the Lord Is 60:1-6; Eph 3:2-3,5-6; Mt. 2:1-12

If the celebration of Christmas in Sri Lanka today, could be attributed to a single individual it is none other than the person of Blessed Joseph Vaz. It was he who resurrected and safeguarded a dying faith in this Island nation, after toiling for almost 24 years, overcoming every odds and emerged victorious in laying a solid foundation for today's Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. Had it not been for him, it would have been well nigh impossible for us to have celebrated the *Year of Faith*, just concluded.

It is but fitting that we carefully analyse the part he played in the celebration of Christmas during his times. It was he who introduced puppetry, depicting Nativity scenes during the Christmas season. The setting up of Cribs, both in Churches and in homes dates back to his times on the model as introduced by St. Francis of Assisi. The singing of Christmas Carols during the festive season was also introduced by Blessed Joseph Vaz, this being his brainchild though it was Fr. Jacome Gonsalves who completed it to perfection with carols of the nature of "*Jesu Upanne*" still a favourite in most of our Churches.

The Poor

Besides, Blessed Joseph Vaz did not forget the poor at Christmas time, providing the needy with food, clothing and shelter as best as he could. As he always did, the sick found added solace in his charity during the festive season and so were the little children, especially those from "broken" homes. At the entrance to his Church was a sack which he placed, to collect rice from well-wishers. This sack never went empty and always provided him with enough and more stocks for distribution among the poor.

Black Christmas

The celebration of Christmas during Blessed Joseph Vaz's

times cannot be passed over without reference to "Black Christmas" in 1689 when he celebrated Midnight Mass in top secrecy in a lonely house in Sillalai, Jaffna. The Dutch soldiers raided the house while Mass was in progress and assaulted all and sundry. Even women and little children were not spared. In the confusion that raged Blessed Joseph Vaz disappeared from human sight and it is said that Divine Providence led him safely through the Wannai jungles into the Madhu area. The journey on foot would have taken him at least a fortnight or more. Hence, in all probability, Madhu had its origins around early January 1690.

Meanwhile, the "Drama" in Sillalai was not over. The lay faithful were all imprisoned in the Jaffna Fort. On Christmas morning the women and children were released, but the men were ordered to appear before Governor Adrian Van Rheedhe. Here, they were given the option either to embrace Calvinism or face death. Dom Pedro, the leader, blatantly refused the offer and was beaten to death that Christmas noon, together with his gallant band of Catholics. What a privilege, to have died for the faith on Christmas noon 1689? *'As the saying goes, the blood of Martyrs is the seed of Christianity'* for today Sillalai boasts of a vibrant Catholic Community, thanks to Dom Pedro and his band of "Faithful."

Marutha Madhu

Shifting to the scene in Madhu, this "*Sammanasu Swami*" Angelic Priest, in course of time established a strong Catholic Community in *Marutha Madhu*. On one occasion when a cobra was about to attack him he blessed the reptile and commanded it never to attack

a Catholic priest - a command which has held good, for the past nearly 320 years as no Catholic priest has since died of snakebite poisoning anywhere in Sri Lanka. The earth dug out from the "pit" inside the Madhu Shrine has for ages been used in the treatment for snakebites. Could this have any connection with the "*Sammanasu - Swami*." Are his remains deposited somewhere in the vicinity?

Blessed Joseph Vaz was laid to rest in Kandy in January 1711. Subsequently, there was an exodus of Catholics from Kandy northwards for fear of Dutch attacks and there is a possibility that the exhumed body of Blessed Joseph Vaz was taken away during this exodus to the Wannai jungles via Wahacotte? If so, did they deposit his remains somewhere in Marutha Madhu? Today, a large and beautiful statue of Blessed Joseph Vaz adorns Madhu Shrine Square, reminding all pilgrims of this "*Sammanasu - Swami*" who not only established a large Catholic Community in Madhu but also firmly rooted the Catholic Faith on Sri Lankan soil, thus laying the solid foundation for today's Catholic Church in Sri Lanka.

Hence, it is but fitting, that every year while we celebrate Christmas we should be grateful to this man of God, son of Goa and Apostle of Sri Lanka, who at the moment, together with our continued prayer is on the threshold of being "raised to the Altar."

Roggy Corera



The Story about a Young Girl

The story goes that some time ago a man punished his 5-year old daughter for wasting a roll of expensive gold wrapping paper.

Money was tight and he became even more upset when the child used the gold paper to decorate a box to put under the Christmas Tree. Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift box to her father the next morning said, "This is for you, Daddy." The father was embarrassed by his earlier overreaction but his anger flared again when he found the box was empty. He spoke to her in a harsh manner.

Do you not know young lady, when you give someone a present there is supposed to be something inside the package?

The little girl looked up at him with tears in her eyes and said, Oh Daddy, it's not empty. I blew kisses into it until it was full. The father was crushed. He fell on his knees and put his arms around his little girl, and he begged her to forgive him for his unnecessary anger.

An accident took the life of the child only a short time later and it is told that the father kept that gold box by his bed all the years of his life.

And whenever he was discouraged or faced difficult problems he would open the box and take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there. In a very real sense, each of us as human beings have been given a golden box filled with unconditional love and kisses from our children, family, friends and God. There is no more precious possession anyone could hold.



Courtesy: Bhakthi Prabodhanaya - January 2014 - Volume 01- Issue 01

Let us Celebrate a Meaningful Christmas



"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. They lived in a land of shadows. But now light is shining on them" (Isaiah 9:2).



Christmas, as we all know, is the Birth-

day of Our Saviour Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Saviour of the world brought light to all mankind, who were in darkness, as the Prophet Isaiah says. He speaks of the darkness of our hearts. During this holy season, we too must focus our attention on the Second Coming of Christ who casts away the darkness of the world.

Today we see a commercialized and social Christmas. The most important aspect - the spiritual aspect of Christmas, is forgotten. Real Christmas is not merry making, but sharing, forgiving and a change of heart. The money we waste on crackers and fireworks, we should give the Lord's poor and the needy. How can we enjoy ourselves when our brothers are starving and are clad in rags? Jesus the King of Kings, the Only Begotten Son of God Almighty, who created everything had no room in Bethlehem for Him to be born. It is the same if we do not have room for Him in our hearts. What was the royal palace of the Divine King? Only a poor cattle-shed. What was

His royal cot? Only a cold manger. What provided His warmth? The straw and the breath of the cattle.



Think of Mary and Joseph how heart-burning it would have been for them when the Inn-keeper said, "There is no room for you in the Inn." Just imagine Joseph pleading with the manager of the Inn, telling him of Mary's condition and their desperate need for a place where she could give birth to her child.



When Christmas is around the corner we hasten to clean and decorate our homes, make Christmas cake, do Christmas shopping, etc. Thus we make all preparations

to entertain visitors. All these traditional celebrations are not bad, but do we give preference to our spiritual cleansing? Let us, but make a good confession, break the cobwebs of our hearts, remove all dust and rubbish which are sins, do away with enmity, make peace with everyone around us. In short prepare our hearts to receive Jesus into our spiritual home, our immortal soul.



We exchange gifts during this season, but what gift do we offer Jesus, the Birthday Baby? We should give Him our love and our whole self, because He gave Himself for us fully and totally without reserve.



Each Christmas reminds us of God's grace, shown to us in the Gift of Jesus, His son. The carols of the season reflect the psalmist's words, "Oh sing to the Lord a new song! for He has done marvelous things, His right hand and His Holy Arm have gained Him the victory. The Lord has made known His salvation, His righteousness he has revealed in the sight of the nations."



May the joy of redemption shine through us this Christmas and throughout the coming year. May I wish you a grace-filled Christmas and a New Year of peace and love.

Florence Wetthasinghe

IN MEMORIAM

FIRST YEAR REMEMBRANCE OF OUR BELOVED THATHTHI



WILFRED M. P. J. SENEWIRATNE

Born : 2 . 4 . 1925
Died : 31 . 12 . 2012

Dearest Lord keep our Thaththi safe in your loving care.

From Your ever loving wife Celine, children Anil, Samanthi and Ajith, in laws Gayani, Lahiru and Shamara, grand children Vinooda and Niroodi, Emily, Sherrica, Amantha and Awindre.

A Holy Mass will be offered for the repose of His soul on Tuesday the 31st December 2013 at 11. a.m. at the Church of the Infant Jesus at Imbulgoda, followed by the Almsgiving. (N5219)

Make life better for those you love. Give them the Messenger

ADVENT-TIME



Advent has come again as a time of grace to prepare for the Lord's visitation to us anew. Is my clock set??? Will I unthinkingly immerse myself in the usual Christmas preparations, running and rushing around? Again? Advent can be a genuinely life-changing time if I am starkly honest and discover what must change in me. What must be polished and cleaned; what needs to be dusted and painted anew; how time must be managed without wasting it in passing fancies? I am personally ready for Christmas only when I feel the need to come to the manger and let the Christ - Child penetrate my life. If not, Christmas is only a temporary feeling and life then goes on just as before. Will it be different this time? It is time to engage in a quest.

Searching and Seeking...

Whoever sets out in search of the Lord shall never be left unanswered. Sim-

ple shepherds desired to see him and found him. Wise men traveled after facing challenges and bowed in adoration on seeing him. Young men seeking for true meaning and purpose in life heard just three words "Come and see," and were magnetized by him. Tough, weather-beaten fisherfolk going through the daily grind, perhaps longing for better times, surprisingly were invited by a stranger "Come, follow me."

They left all and walked behind Him not just for three years but till their own courageous, sacrificial death.

Those unwanted by society as outcasts, sinners, publicans and prostitutes found in him an answer to their seeking. The blind and the lame cried out to him; the rich like Simon and Zacheus were attracted to him in ways unknown and strange even to them.

Evil spirits recognized him and

had to be hushed by Jesus into silence for his time to reveal himself had not yet come (Luke 4:41). Even without seeking a Roman centurion found him as "indeed a good man, the Son of God" (Mark 15:39).

A crucified, dying thief sought him in desperation and was rewarded with the promise of paradise. A brave, grieving woman, Mary sought even the Lord's dead body and met him "incognito." When he uttered her name in that familiar way, she knew at once it was her Master "Rabboni."

Deeply touched by the miracle of His Resurrection a single woman ran to tell the men folk, "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:11f).

Herod the mighty "had long desired to see him because he had heard about him" (Luke 23:8). Jesus always had only one option...to present himself to his loving seekers, "Seekers, finders" seems to be the Lord's message.

Through many Gospel narratives the cry of the people is: "We have found him" (John 1.41), "Come and see for yourselves" (John 4.29); "We have seen the Lord" (John 20.25); "They knew it was the Lord" (John 21.12); "...that which we have seen and heard and touched.. we proclaim to you" (1 John 1. 1ff).

Lord, help us to seek you on our Advent journey through a little more time spent on prayer and reflection and reading your Word. Then this coming Christmas will be a celebration of FINDING you in a deeper, more loving, stronger way within my heart and mind and life.

Rev. Sr. Cynthia Mendis. PH

Cold Hearts and the Cold Christmas Night



The evening was calm and quiet, as the air held the stillness of the night. The sun began to set in the Western horizon, with its radiant rays flickering in the crystal blue sky. The evening shadows lengthened enveloping the

entire earth surface, when a young beautiful lady, fully covered with woven clothing sat very carefully, but not comfortably, on the back of a donkey, which was treading its way through the winding roads that led to the Town of

Bethlehem.

A tall handsome person with grown beard was walking in front of the donkey, holding its reins. The lady who was uncomfortably seated was carrying a baby in her blessed womb. The donkey knowing his importance was thinking that he was carrying the Messiah and His mother, walked very proudly but carefully over the hills and valleys, nodding its head on either side to avoid the rugged paths. This was possible for the donkey because of the slanting moonlight that fell through the branches of the Olive Trees.

The darkness grew thicker and thicker as they approached the little Town of Bethlehem. The sky was brightly lit with flickering stars. The landscape was adorned with beauty and a soft wind that blew across the mountains brought some relief to the weary travellers.

After a tedious journey they arrived at Bethlehem, the City of King David. As Joseph, the husband, was a descendent of the family of King David, he would have expected, that some of his relatives might help him to stay overnight but to his dismay "No room" was the reply from the inn. Many had come to Bethlehem for a census on the orders of the Emperor.

Joseph did not have much money and the weariness was unbearable. The coldness of the night grew stronger and stronger, as the wind blew faster and harder. The inn keeper saw the now uncovered face of the young lady, a face full of radiance and felt sorry for her and offered the stable, which was a little further from the inn. Joseph willingly agreed. Being a carpenter he set up the stable for Mary, the Mother of Jesus to lie down.

Since then we have come to another Christmas

eve and still we say there is "No room" for Jesus to stay. But in school we studied that the whole of the Ten Commandments are contained in just two. "Love God above all things and love thy neighbour as thyself." We have dutifully observed the first, while neglecting the second.

The Church on her part has established orphanages, homes for the aged, schools for the deaf and blind, houses for the tsunami affected families, food and shelter for the flood victims, etc., but what have we done as Catholics? We give things out of excess and satisfy our ego. When we neglect the poor the fundamentalists creep in and supply their deficiency. So the poor in utter desperation embrace their teaching and help. It is we Catholics who should change our approach to social justice.

A Blessed Christmas to all!

D. Gerard Kithudasa

On His way to be born



Can you hear those voices celestial?
'Nattal' dreams are in the air.
Son of God. Son of man
Safe and happy as a lamb
In His mother's warming waters,
makes His way to Bethlehem.
But
There's no room in the inn of the town
For the Prince of Peace to be born.
They put Him and His Father and Mother
In a cow shed at the back, a barn.
The cows and their friends make room, moo moo
For their heavenly guest to rest
Cows and their friends make them room
Warming the manger with their breath
Their grassy, greeny freshening breath,
To make for them a home.
The magi are gazing at a wonderful star
Guiding them on to a manger afar.

Sri Kumar Abeyesekere

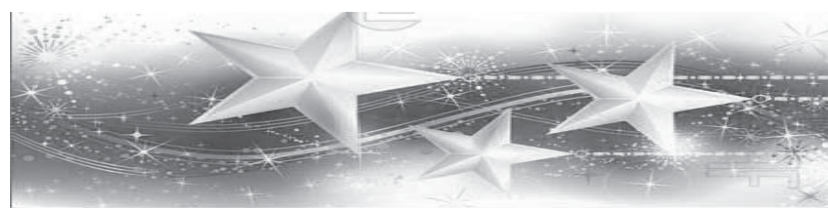
Can I be a Star?

The Star which arose in the sky right above the Manger became
An irrevocable sign
A sign which announced the Birth of the Saviour
A sign of love for the abandoned,
A sign of hope for the downcast
A sign of peace for the ruffled
It did not remain merely a sign but
dispelled the darkness of the earth,
That made the path of wise men visible..

Can I be a star.....? (Like that)
Not to be worshiped by people,
Not to be honoured,
Not to be enthroned either,
But to be a light to the nation,
To be a sign of hope, love and peace
Through which people will taste the Creator's love,

One thing I have got to understand and remember...
The Star is not the Salvation and cannot be the Salvation
But only a tiny instrument in the hand of God
Which facilitates Salvation.
(Without the Sun, the Star cannot be illuminated)

Bro. Benedict Jayamanna O.Cist
Cistercian Community



English with Fun and Entertainment



Dear Readers,

In our twelfth lesson we learnt the speech sounds (ei) and (e) a funny tale of a little boy an anecdote about heaven, a role play, quotes about women and five proverbs.

In this lesson we will read about Christmas inspirational quotes, poems related to Christmas and a legend about a Christmas gift.

Thanks for the readers who made valuable suggestions and for using these lessons effectively. You are invited to share your experiences to enrich our lessons further.

With best regards!

NJ



Task 1 : Read the Inspirational Quotes

- (i) The Son of God became a man to enable men to become the sons of God. -C.S.Lewis
- (ii) Love has a name.JESUS Love has a place. Our hearts.Love has a story. And it's not finished yet. -Unnkown
- (iii) God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame. Elizabeth Barrett Browning
- (iv) How many observe Christ's birthday! How many, his precepts! O! 'tis easier to keep Holidays than Commandments. -Benjamin Franklin
- (v) Best of all, Christmas means a spirit of love, a time when the love of God and love of our fellow men should prevail over all hatred and bitterness, a time when our thoughts and deeds and the spirit of our lives manifest the presence of God. -George F. McDougall
- (vi) Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, Love divine; Love was born at Christmas; Star and angels gave the sign. -Christina Rossetti
- (vii) The joy that you give to others, Is the joy that comes back to you. -John Greenleaf Whittier
- (viii) God sent a star to light the night for The Way, The Truth, The Life--His Son. He sent the Light of Life to prove His heart so we would invite His Son into our own. God has given us all the light we'll ever need to find peace on earth, goodwill to men. -Pamela F. Dowd
- (ix) Where there is faith, there is love; Where there is love, there is peace; Where there is peace, there is God; And where there is God; there is no need. -Leo Tolstoy



Task 2: Read the Poems :

This Little Babe?

By Denis J.

His hands are that of mercy
His toes are full of strength
His life a new beginning
That has eternal length
His skin is pure and perfect
And eyes are full of grace
What kind of king is born
In such a common place?

Our Father who art in heaven
Our Father from above
Truly is this your son
You sent for us to love?

So Great A Love

By Bobbie F. Kimmel

Her time was almost at hand, but taxes had to be paid in all the land.

They traveled for miles and miles, knowing that soon they would have their little child.

Her days were accomplished in the little town of Bethlehem, but not a room could be found.

In a barn with cattle and sheep

This little babe in swaddling clothes
Lying in a manger
His innocence and purity...
He'll keep us all from danger?
Is it true if we believe in Him
He'll lead us not astray?
And you'll have mercy in your heart
When it comes the judgment day?

Oh, Alleluiah, praise and glory
As I follow I will sing
Thank you Lord Almighty for this
Blessed little King

would be
where they
would find their sleep.

Baby Jesus was born that night, with a beautiful star shining bright.

Because God sent His Son from above, the world would now know how to love.

Task 3 : Legend of the Christmas Rose - Read the story and answer the questions given below?

Christmas is the season of giving gifts, thereby, showing love towards one another. This does not mean that the gifts are the sole expression of your love. No gift is costlier or more valuable than something that comes straight from the heart even if the gift in question is inconsequential. The tradition of gifts during Christmas originated from the kind gestures of the three Wise Men who brought expensive presents for the Infant Jesus to welcome him into this world. Since then, people have made gifts a mandate for Christmas. But, this must be remembered, as the legend of Christmas Rose will show you, that the gesture counts more than the gift. Perhaps, this legend originated just to teach people that, no matter what you gift, it must be from the heart and soul - even if the gift in question is just a flower. It is owing to this legend that the Christmas rose, the flower which only blooms during the chill of winter, has become an important part of Yuletide celebrations.

The Legend

On a cold December night, everybody was coming to see their new Savior and brought Him all kinds of gifts and presents. The three Wise Men came in with their valuable gifts of myrrh, frankincense and gold and offered them to Baby Jesus. At that point, a shepherdess, Madelon, who had seen the wise men passing through, reached the door of the stable, to see the Child. However, being very poor and having brought nothing to offer to the child, she felt helpless and started weeping quietly at the sight of all the wonderful gifts that the Three Wise Men had got for the child. Earlier, she had searched, in vain, for flowers all over the countryside but there was not even a single bloom to be found in the bitter winter.

An angel outside the door was watching over her and knew about her fruitless search. He took pity on her and, when he saw her head drooped down in sorrow, decided to help her with a little miracle. He gently brushed aside the snow at her feet and where her tears had fallen, sprang a beautiful cluster of waxen white winter roses with pink tipped petals. Then he softly whispered into the shepherdess's ear that these Christmas roses are far more valuable than any myrrh, frankincense or gold, for they are pure and made of love. The maiden was pleasantly surprised when she heard those words and joyfully gathered the flowers and offered them to the Holy Infant, who, seeing that the gift was reared with tears of love, smiled at her with gratitude and satisfaction. Thus, the Christmas rose came to symbolize hope, love and all that is wonderful in this season.

- (i) Why do people give Christmas gifts?
- (ii) How did the tradition of giving gifts during Christmas originate?
- (iii) Did the shepherdess, Madelon have anything to offer the infant Jesus ?
- (iv) What did she look for ?
- (v) What did the Angel see?
- (vi) What happened when he gently brushed aside the snow at her feet and where her tears had fallen,?
- (vii) What did he softly whisper into the shepherdess's ear?
- (viii) What did the maiden do ?



Answers

Task 1

- (i) To show love towards one another
- (ii) from the kind gestures of the three Wise Men who brought expensive presents for the Infant Jesus to welcome him into this world
- (iii) No
- (iv) She looked for flowers
- (v) He saw her head drooped down in sorrow
- (vi) There sprang a beautiful cluster of waxen white winter roses with pink tipped petals.
- (vii) That those Christmas roses were far more valuable than any myrrh, frankincense or gold, for they were pure and made of love.
- (viii) She gathered the flowers and offered them to the Holy Infant,

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