

Christmas 2017

Two brothers, who were in Elementary school, went to their grandparents' house for a sleep over before Christmas. The younger one prayed before going to bed. He was almost shouting as he prayed this way, "Dear God grant me a mountain bike for this Christmas." His older brother told him. Why do you pray so loud? God is not deaf? Then the young one turned to his brother and said, "I know that God is not deaf but our grandparents are." Children like gifts and especially at Christmas they look forward to opening their gifts. Christmas is God's special gift to humankind and especially to each one of us. At Christmas Christ himself comes to us as a gift.

"When we give anything, we give part of ourselves. When we give ourselves, we give everything we have." In becoming man just like any of us, Jesus became personally involved in our life, suffering and in our destiny. No one can doubt the quality of the Lord's self-gift ... of his unconditional love for us."

In the Christmas mystery, the Son of God became totally involved in our human history. Thus, in every Christmas celebration, Jesus is given to us as a model of self-giving. He shows us the way to love.

In today's first reading prophet Isaiah tells that the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light and upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. Isaiah prophecies in the time of King Ahaz, who did not rule the Judah in accordance with the covenant between God and his people. He was weak and relied upon the foreign alliances rather than on God's power to save. With a weak king and powerful enemies on every side, the historical situation of Judah was so often characterized by darkness and gloom. In such situation the prophet announces that the darkness and gloom will be transformed into light and joy. The cause for this joy is a child who is to be born. Isaiah may have been thinking of the son to be born of Ahaz, that is Hezekiah. Though, he was a good king he did not measure up to the glorious description of the prophecy. Isaiah's

prophecy gave rise to expectations of an ideal king through whom God would transform darkness into light and gloom into joy. He is the Messiah, the Christ.

The Gospel of Luke gives us the narrative about the birth of Jesus placing him at the center of the secular Roman history. Caesar Augustus had called for a census and he expected each adult male to report and register in his home country. Hence Joseph had to go to Bethlehem along with Mary to his native country. There Jesus was born in a Cattle shed. The creator of the universe could not find a place for his own son on earth. His warmth was from the animals; his visitors were the shepherds, the illiterate the reject of the society. Yet the whole atmosphere was suffused with joy. There was the joy of the angels and the enthusiasm of the shepherds as they hasten to Bethlehem to find the new-born child.

In the Gospel St. Luke states that “there was no place for them in the inn”. There was no place for them in the inn because the inn is the place for strangers ... for traveling strangers who stay only for the night. But Christ is not a stranger. He comes to his own. “The word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The inn is not a place for him to stay because he is not a stranger or distant from us. He belongs to us. His total involvement in our human destiny makes him really one with us. He could never be born in the inn, that is, outside of us. He has to be born in each one of us. He has to make his home in each of us.

The child Jesus lying in a manger, symbol of God’s nourishment for his people. A manger is a box or trough in a stable from which the cattle eat. Baby Jesus in the manger symbolizes that he is going to be food for us. Not an ordinary food but the food that gives us eternal life. the Lord Jesus who, on the night when he was given up, offered us the Eucharistic bread and the chalice of life ... the Lord Jesus, gentle shepherd and king, who laid down his life for us on the cross – the altar of sacrifice ... **HE IS STILL PRESENT IN OUR MIDST!** He is Emmanuel, God-with-us. In our Christmas celebration, he invites us to be a “gift of love” for others.

Because God has loved us, we too must become lovers – lovers of one another. Only if we love the visible neighbor can we love the invisible God. This gift of love is exemplified in the self-giving act of a five-year old boy on behalf of his little sister. After the blood transfusion, he asked the doctor with a trembling voice, “Say, doctor, when do I start to die?” He thought that by giving his life-blood to his kid sister, he would die.