

Merry Christmas

The Daily Star Special December 25, 1994



Come, Hear the Christmas Story...

by Sunita D'Costa

Somewhere in time, someone thought I must be born, I must be born. The grip of wisdom was losing hold. Hearts of men getting colder than cold. And so, on one silent night The sky wore a star brighter than bright. The music of angels sprayed the air Sweeter than sweet, rarer than rare. For Hope was born, Hope was there. Shepherds and scholars flocked to the site What a delight, what a delight! There lay Hope in swaddling clothes. Smiling at all, friends or foes. I am born, I am here. Do not fear, do not fear! Share with all the Christmas cheer.

Phantasmagoria

by Hubert Francis Sarkar

That marvelous alchemy, the trust of the Gypsy and her alter-ego. And that ubiquitous zombie. All these blend into a phantasmagoria.

As the young lovers leave the alcove And give two shivering urchins their pull-overs, I am tempted to sing a hymn at love's instant gloria.

But, whenever I feel the mind-numbing stares Of horrifying famines and as I confront the worst night-mares, The Christmas loses gloria.

Yet, when I remember those lovers, All the world turns into another splendidous Vancouver. My heart is over-whelmed with euphoria.

Source of Peace for All The Voice of the Poor

by Richard Tapas Adhikary

THE whole Christian world has to deliver the message of Christmas, usually celebrated on the 25th December, to its neighbour world of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others. The coverage of the occasion may appear cultural but the essence of the day is the commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ. The commemoration should be deep down at the heart of a Christian. It should be ringed with true-felt love to share, and care for those who are helpless and in predicament.

Jesus was born in a stable, to the poor parents. The star heralded the message of his birth. His birth was distinct like his death on the cross. The contemporary people (not all) were misled by Sadducees, the so called rank and file, and forced the governor Pilate to sacrifice the most innocent Jesus Christ in exchange of releasing the most notorious convict called Barabbas. Barabbas represents all sorts of sin — theft, forgery, adultery, murder, incest and what not, on earth. Jesus stands for love, innocence and responsibility for others. Jesus was crucified to shoulder all sins of Barabbas and Mankind.

Jesus Christ's sacrifice completes the tradition of giving blood for others. From time immemorial people from different sects and clans have been performing rituals of blood giving for salvation or for other noble purposes. Christ's crucifixion opens an opportunity for man to submit his all sorts of human despair, illicit and malicious motives, ambition etc. right to the holy feet of innocent Jesus. By means of confession and remorse a man could be cleansed of sins through accepting Jesus as saviour who never married, never owned any earthly thing for his own and had been nailed for other's guilt.

Science and philosophies have developed modes of life. Nevertheless, man cannot overcome or overlook his spiritual

needs, the needs from within. According to the four Gospels, Jesus had hundreds of events where he healed paralysed, leper, abnormal blind people in his life time. It means, diseases bring about major part of sorrow in humanity which is still the same. Jesus advocates his followers to be sympathetic and loving. This makes so and so institutions and hospitals to be working to cater education, medical services most generously to those who are mostly non-Christians even, in the remotest part of the world.

Jesus advocates every Christian not to think to punish any blasphemer who only subjects to God's judgement, not man's. It is just like of a state here. No citizen has any right to take law in hand against any one himself. The state will settle the matter. Jesus wants us not to sacrifice any costly goods to worship him and rectifies Jewish law of sacrifice of animal to God to avoid social competition. He urges each one of us to submit our own self to the feet of holy Jesus in faith.

True to account but hard to imagine the fact of Jesus' unhesitated and unprotested crucifixion has ransomed a new world as well as good news for all and sundry. His human fate was exchanged with the top-most crime-maker Barabbas of the day which declares world's unique story where Jesus crowned life without crown, a voluntary personae who professes when you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting (Matth 6:16) and asks people to love their enemies as much as their friends, "for it is pagans who love only their friends and hate foes, for God has poured sunlight on both the good and the bad alike". Thus he establishes the essence of Christianity in the truth of loving non-Christians, praying for their wellbeing, beyond any sense of revenge.

As Isaac and Ishmael are two brothers (sons of Abraham or

Ibrahim), so are Christians, Muslims as well as others all brothers.

The annals of Jesus' sufferings, having no traces at all of his personal pleasure of flesh like any other man in the world, have had the grandest intimidating force that never intimidates any non-Christian to exercise his own belief. Various aspects, detailed in the New Testament, in terms of the dealings with each people in the society, explained his many ideas to be truly apt to settle up society's various problems on the point of law and order. For example, once Jesus was come across by a group of wrathful people who were about to kill a lady (caught adulterating red-handed) by stoning, with shouts at the top of their voice, to follow the day's law of Moses. Jesus by nature stopped with a curiosity and questioned of what crime the woman did. The angry mob answered that the lady was an adulterer who deserved nothing but death punishment by stoning as per law. Jesus having an inner accusation of concentration and introspection of self, told all of them that anyone of them, if rid of such crime like adultery or else, might have that moral license to stone the lady to death. But this made them all flee away leaving her unhurt.

Jesus, inculcating faith in man's heart, asks him to cost his own for other's purpose of services which the Christian citizens of the country adhere to and must serve Bangladesh as their motherland. As on this holy and happy Christmas, we, the Christians, should be obsessed with the idea to play the role as part and parcel of the population through various benevolent social activities, philanthropic missions, to alleviate sufferings and tragedies of all Bangladeshis irrespective of cast and creed.

The last but not the least is our a true thankful and compassionate heartfull of Christ's love on his Happy Birthday right for the whole nation.

THIS year in a Christmas party President Bill Clinton quoted, "It is freedom for everybody or freedom for nobody. And thus Jesus was born, born for all of us, in a manger, on Christmas, in the cold, in the middle of a winter night, in the unheard of poverty of the extremely poor, in solitude, in an abandonment unique in this world. What we, the Christians, can learn from his birth? To believe in his love, to believe that he has loved us until now. To hope in him, who has loved us so dearly. He wanted to teach us the greatest gift of God, the humility. Through him God puts a Child in Our Midst.

In Bangladesh, it raises questions that command our attention to a world that is literally torn apart by conflict and strife at every level — between nations, between regions, between peoples, between religions, between ideologies, between churches, between families, between individuals, even within a person's own heart. At present, Russian warplanes bombed the outskirts of Chechnia and troops clashed with rebel fighters northwest of the country. War in Bosnia destroyed total hope of peace, humanity, specially of Muslims. Then, what is the Christian understanding of the term, reconciliation? What relationship does it bear to justice? What must come first, justice or reconciliation? Where is reconciliation needed?

Christ, making himself poor from manger even to the point of crucifixion, came to announce to the poor the Good News of the Kingdom. By these means we are reconciled by the forgivingness of Christ and are introduced to a communion with God. And the Christian ideal is an ideal of forgivingness. So, it raises questions in Bangladeshi churches what responsibility do Christians have in bringing about reconciliation here?

"He called a child, and had him stand in front of them." We

believe that is what is happening to us at this time. Jesus Christ is putting a child in our midst as the object, lesson of what we have to learn.

The child is placed in front of the disciples just as Jesus is beginning his journey to the cross. The disciples are arguing who will be the greatest. Their concern is advancement and promotion and ambition, and he puts a child in their midst. Now think about the child, this is what the Kingdom is about. This is what the message of Christmas is Jesus created a revolution in the attitude of the world to children. They are everywhere in the gospels. From his own birth and childhood to his commendation of the children's praise on Palm Sunday, children are central in the thinking of Jesus.

There is hardly anything other that makes Jesus more distinctive from the leaders of other world religions than this — the place he gives to the child. The attitude of the people of this time is represented in Matthew 19:1-32. "Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and to pray for them, but the disciples scolded the people". And Jesus says, "Let the children come to me... the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." William Wordsworth in his poem, "Ode on the Intimations on Immortality," describes the child as coming from the presence of God and progressively forgetting all of that, the longer he lives and the more he or she grows up. So, we are deeply concerned for heart of a child's survival. It is interesting that Pharaoh tried to kill Moses; Herod tried to kill Jesus. In this world without heart of a child we can not be a man of reconciliation. The history of salvation is the story of mankind's liberation from evil and its introduction to the freedom of the children of God. Here one meets Jesus in manger, the model to whom we

THE REASON FOR CHRISTMAS

The reason for Christmas - the reason for the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ - are anything but pleasant or positive for us. Let us think about it for one moment; God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. They included clear and exact instructions in order to be able to receive blessing from the Lord. In Leviticus 26:3 we read: "If you walk in My statutes and keep my commandments, and perform them, **then**

then:

- I will give you rain in its season (V.4)
- I will give peace in the land (V.6)
- I will look on you with favour and make you fruitful (V9)
- I will put my dwelling-place among you and be your God, and I will not abhor you (V.11).

All of these promises are promises of blessing which one will obtain, if he keeps the commandments. But at the same time it is written in Leviticus 26:14; "But if you will not listen to me and not carry out all these commandments, **then**

then

- I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever (V16)
- I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies (V17)
- I myself will be hostile towards you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over (V24)
- I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you (V33) (History of Israel)

Near the mountain of Horeb God's people agreed to these commandments and proclaimed them to be good. But only a very short time afterwards it became true that man is by no means in the position to keep the commandments.

The Israelites offended already after a very short time against the commandments and therefore malediction, sword, affliction and scattering among the nations came upon them. The human beings - I and you included - never were and are in the position to keep what they wanted and promised to do, but they only sinned and transgressed the instructions of the Lord. Can you recognize your situation? This is the situation under the law. All people are under the law.

The situation of man is hopeless. He is not able to keep the commandments, and he could not even achieve one good result. What should be done now?

If God wants to bless and to save man, then He has to choose another way. What else should He do with man, who is a failure and who is in such a hopeless situation? The answer is Christmas. God Himself interferes.

He interferes for → all Mankind
→ all religions
→ you and me.

How could we for example, think of God's interference?

- that He is angry with men?
- that He warns them again?
- that He threatens them?

Is this the message of Christmas? No, but we must be aware that we would have merited anger, warnings and threatening.

But God's nature is totally different. Through his angel he announces the following to the people:

"Do not be afraid - Attention - I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord!"

Are we aware that

instead of scolding or rebuke
instead of threat
instead of punishment

He says: **"Do not be afraid. Listen carefully: I bring you good news of great joy, for your Saviour has been born."**

Have we not already suffered, too,

because of our character.
because we failed to do good things-
because of our failures,
because of our sins,
because of our misbehavior, envy, jealousy, bad temper, lying, stealing and not saying the truth
because we had the impression:

We are those who should be punished?

But God has prepared for us something totally different than punishment - this is the message of Christmas. He does not want us to fear, but He gives us a Saviour: Jesus Christ. He takes us out of our trouble.

Please tell Him now everything what troubles you: "Your failure, your shortcomings, your needs and ask Him to take the responsibility for your life. He wants to move us to follow His instructions (Ezekiel 37:24). He wants to forgive us, to lead us, He even wants to be the motor of our life. He wants to accomplish and to perform good works in us.

But - on the other side - Christmas does not mean: You have to become a better Christian, but Christmas tells us: **Admit, that you need a Saviour. Do not be afraid. He has been born. He died for you. He rose from the dead for you, He has time for you, and He has all power in Heaven and on earth.**

It is a great privilege for us to spread this Good News into the non-Christian world which is mastered by law. The message of deliverance, of forgiveness of all sins and of Jesus acting in our lives hits the nerve of the Non-Christians, because the Non-Christians do not know anything about assurance of pardon nor assurance of everlasting life. But Jesus offers these two gifts freely. "Whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17b).

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