

Merry Christmas

The Daily Star Special Feature December 25, 1995



The Spirit of Christmas

by Joseph D'Silva

DEAR Jonathan and Julian: Christmas is upon us! Therefore, you will have already caught some of the Christmas spirit. What is Christmas all about? — It is the birth of Jesus, the joy of a celebration. Christmas is church, paper bunting and streamers, kirtans and carols, new clothes, exchange of gifts, Christmas cards and good food.

We know from the Bible that Jesus was born on Christmas day and that his birth was announced to a group of shepherds by angels from heaven. I think that the spirit of Christmas was captured by those angels and the shepherds who immediately went to see him. Later on, of course, you know that wise men from the east also visited Jesus with gifts of frankincense and myrrh — all very priceless articles in those days. There was therefore this curiosity on the part of the shepherds, joy on the part of the angels and pure happiness for the wise men. People had been waiting for a Jesus (some still are!) according to the Old Testament to deliver them. Of course Jews at that time took this deliverance from the hands of the tyrannical Romans who were ruling over Palestine. But for many others, it meant deliverance from sin.

Since the time of Jesus' birth, some 2000 years ago, men have tried to capture the spirit of Christmas in writings, paintings and music. Famous among these are the Gift of the Magi, a Christmas Carol by Dickens and many popular Christmas carols. But for the ordinary person throughout the world, the joy of Christmas has been manifested in merry-making during the season. We do not know how or when this tradition began. But I suppose it all goes back to those angels and shepherd and the wise men.

At Christmas, people try to capture the spirit of Christmas by decorating their homes, some by putting up a Christmas tree. Many will wear new clothes, eat good food and exchange gifts and greetings with one another. It is also a time to think of the poor. The taking of new-at-birth clothes, I think, rose from Jesus being wrapped in swaddling clothes, according to Matthew in the Bible. I don't have the faintest idea how food came into Christmas. But I suppose Palestinians and Christians at that time all enjoyed a good occasion and celebrated with a feast of food. The exchange of gifts definitely is from the wise men who gave presents to Jesus. The poor have always been thought of at Christmas particularly because Jesus was born in a stable, in lowly surroundings. Why Jesus, son of God, chose

to be born in a stable, I have no idea. He could have been born in this parents' home which must have been very ordinary.

Now, the spirit of Christmas goes on to this day, being captured by people according to customs and traditions of their own land. In Bangladesh we will remember our near

and dear ones, at home and abroad, buy clothes, eat pithas and cakes, polao rice, meat and oranges in many homes. There will be gaiety, mirth and laughter in the air. But for many poorer people, Christmas will not bring this fare: they will not eat a sumptuous meal nor wear new clothes. It is for these people my heart cries out for and I wish you would praise God for the many good things we have been given. One thing is for sure: rich or poor, we shall all wish one another for Christmas by touching the feet or kissing the hands or the cheeks or simply by bowing to one another. And we will see children running to and fro, talking as loudly as ever, buying this and that from the *ferrywallah* — all in good excitement. Older people, too, will be going from home to home greeting people. These celebrations will last until the new year. Although the festivity is for Christians, many non-Christians will also join in on the *bon homie* of Christmas. And why not?



Christmas celebration in a Bangladesh home

We in Bangladesh are most fortunate. We have been blessed to witness two other large festivals in the year: Eid and Puja. Is Christmas like any of these? In a sense, yes, because we all enjoy a festive occasion. I have been saying for some time that one must give in to festive moments now and again because it is in the nature of man to do so. More so for children than for adults.

Hence, occasions are needed for celebration and enjoyment. (Only a Scrooge wouldn't realise that!). In this respect then, Christmas is no different from any other festivity. However, the spirit of Christmas is different: the idea of Christ's birth, the thought that it is in giving that we receive and so on.

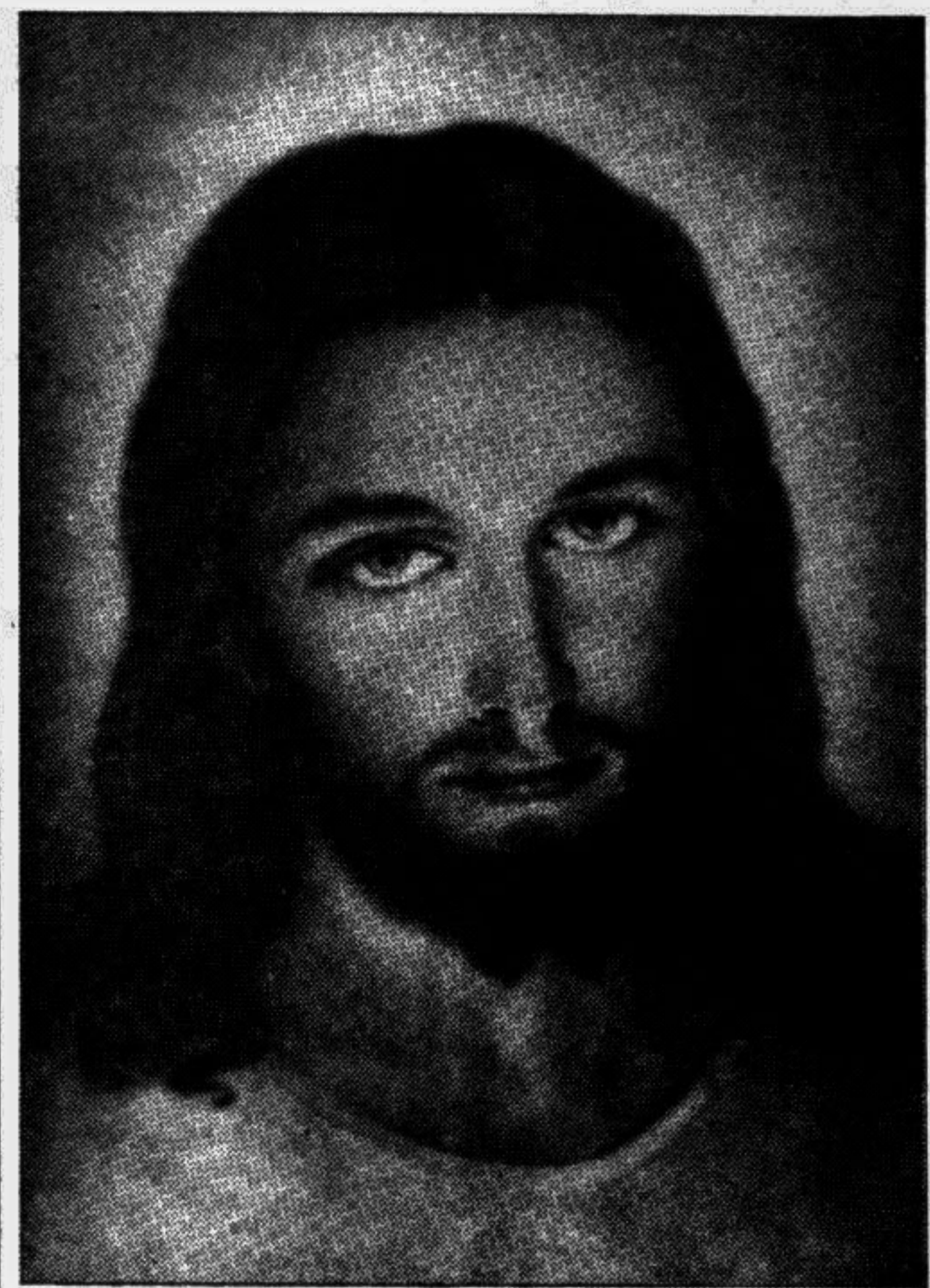
Sadly, however, the celebration of Christmas to a great many, is a holiday, a time to go out and buy and give gifts or to take a vacation. Since we live in an age of instant communication via satellite, TV and telephone, e-mail hook-up, migrations and emigrations, to and from developed nations such as Europe and America and Australia, one runs away with the impression that Christmas is unreal. It is money-making time for the merchants. This is true. Also true is the fact that sending Christmas cards, which was once a pure joy and pleasure, is a mechanical procedure, bereft of any meaning. We have lost the touch of holiness associated with Christmas.

In our own country Bangladesh, the spirit of Christmas is best captured in the village. Many townspeople who have village homes will go there to catch Christmas. Why? — I suppose there is a freedom in the village which is not found in the town. But again many would rather stay on in the cities. For them the distances required to cover the visit to friends, the cost of transportation and the myriads of other problems that beset us make Christmas a one-day affair. But Christmas, traditionally, should last until the 6th of January.

For societies in developed nations, Christmas will be a *jote de vivre*. Will the Christmas spirit live on? Will it survive? These questions haunt me. I suppose since the Christmas spirit captured 2000 years ago hasn't still faded away in spite of man's advancement, Christmas will not go away. However, as to with what earnestness and with what purpose it is cherished is something you will be able to tell better.

Shuvo Boro Din.

Your Father,
Joe



The Journey to Christ

by Sunita D'Costa

This is me, gradually rising from the lesser origins of a long process of development-growth and my final elevation is to the human plane after numerous degradations for improper utilizations of good chances earlier. Degradations meaning total material contamination, perhaps. It is difficult to visualize the chain of continuity, but somewhere along the line I can see myself entangled in the complexity and chaos of modern materialistic life, bleak and strident.

However, a radical change in human-orientation altered the course and brought me to where I am now, at the crossroads of my future destination. Fear grips my heart. Who can say whether I will remain on this human plane or whether the flickering mind will bring in dualities and fling me back, way back to the point where the egocentric self could think no better. Not again, I say to myself. At this crucial juncture of existence, the answer is within me. So-lace gained at the expense of destroying a soul, one's own or another's, is no comfort, for it builds the road to the lower levels of origin, to the region of mental turbulence and misery.

Inflicting harm on others, big or small, rich or poor, black or white, religious or atheist will only bring self degradation. The light of Jesus Christ will show us the path of peace, the path of liberty, above all the path of friendship. Christmas comes and Christmas goes, but the eternal light shines on, for you and for me. It is our supreme destination. The journey to Christ, to the path of perfection. And it is within us, within our reach. We will follow this light, the light that gave its life for mankind, and enter the eternal life that is full of knowledge. MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Christmas: An Embodiment of Hope and Spirits

by Jerome Sarkar

BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST
Jesus Christ was born at Bethlehem in Judea during the reign of King Herod. He came to purge the world of sins and oppression. The Christians all over the world celebrate His birth every year on 25th December. Thus Christmas ushers in the message of hope, joy and peace infusing a sense of togetherness in the people of the world.

CELEBRATION
(Preparation and Mood): On the surface, it is a celebration of a birthday. But for the devout Christians it has an immense significance. As the chilly wind begins to blow conveying the setting in of the winter, the mood of Christmas sprouts and everyone begins to contemplate a grand celebration — the styles and cuts of new dresses, colourful decoration of houses, setting up of Christmas trees, cradles etc.

In the midst of shivering cold, the Mid-night mass, prayers, hymns and melodious music at the church, the hearts of the devotees are lifted in overwhelming joy. The mirthful sentiments take over the celebrants. After the Mid-night congregation, the youths bring out carols. They visit houses of fellow Christians and chant cheers over the Christmas Christmas is a fountain of inspiration and happiness.

On the occasion, many fondly remember their beloved ones who have left for eternal kingdom and some families gather at the graves of near and dear ones to say prayers. (Our family will miss my youngest son Hubert Francis who left for eternal life on 15th April, 1995, and remember Maria, my wife, and a few friends and relatives like others).

TEACHING (Triumph of Love over Poverty) What does the Christmas teach us? Born in the stable, Jesus recognised humbleness, poverty and love for the teeming suffering mankind. Later, it found constant manifestation in His teachings. The humility of heart and spirit of sacrifice have been the crux of His teachings. Jesus Christ embraced death opposing the conventional oppressive system and exploitation.

He taught, "Love thy neighbour as thyself". The followers of Christ preferred to embrace martyrdom rather than kowtowing to the whims and caprices of the agents of darkness and death. They have been opposing the

injustices and persecutions of the righteous, inspiring millions to accept hardship for stalking the path of truth and beauty.

Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi never compromised with injustice nor resorted to violence nor accepted any provocation for achieving their goals. Christ's teachings are truly reflected in their attitudes and movements. Their movements were not for their self gains but for the people and finally they have succeeded in their missions.

MODERN MEN AND RELIGION (Practicalities, Betrayal and Bitterness) In the face of turmoil, wars, destruction, tortures, injustice, selfishness and negligence, the world is in the grip of anxieties and tensions.

Even the religious leaders are gradually deviating from the original nobility. Taking the advantage of the innocent God-fearing people, the leaders wantonly exploit them. The aberration has in its wake caused betrayals and bitterness.

People of this part of the world are religious. Religion is the hub of life here. Today's man agrees that every Religion has its good teachings to evoke the spirituality and to guide the mankind properly. The religious rites and rituals are regularly observed and the religion-based enmity as prevailed in the past, is gradually declining in modern men.

The religious leaders command confidence of the general people. As such, it is their responsibility to help their people attain peace, joy and justice. They are capable to define the values of spiritual life through their liturgical lectures and activities. They are assumed to be ordained with the virtues of sacrifice, dedication, devotion, forgiveness and so on. Hence they are held in high esteem no matter what religion he belongs to. They should, therefore, practise what they teach and thus arrest present declining respect and trust of the people. They should endeavour to become model characters. This will instill confidence and cooperation in the people.

PRACTISE WHAT YOU PREACH Many people are floating and jeering at the back of the religious leaders. Often it is felt that the leaders try to hide the truth by clouds. Even if they do not do it, injustice is being committed under their very noses.

but they play tacit role in order to be in the good book of the higher-ups in the guise of futile neutrality.

Their lectures and professing simply remain in words and do not reflect in their lives. They are compromising with moral degradation. These days, people can read the motives of hyperbolic expressions. So the pretence is unveiled and the truth is always revealed. If they fail to realise it and make their teachings the prime of their living, they will cause a big havoc to the community and their own selves.

The attitudinal and behavioural patterns of the leaders have direct bearing on the faithful. In the light of the aforesaid situation, the people seem to neglect religious aspects and obligations. Resultantly erosion of morality, degradation of human values, mounting of tension.



fear, domination over the weak etc have been growing unabated. Moral conscience is vanishing. "Might is right" is the rule of the day and peace of the world is being shattered by the devilish power and

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neer/design a system, a moral bond, physical smartness, spiritual confidence to perpetuate welfare of the community.

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