

# MERRY CHRISTMAS

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## The Incarnation of Christ and Biblical holism

REV. MARTIN ADHIKARY

THE Gospel according to St. Matthew records that when Jesus came down from the Mountain preaching the Sermon on the Mount he was immediately followed by a crowd of people amazed with his wonderful and authoritative teaching. Out of the crowd there came a man, who was afflicted with the dreaded disease called leprosy. The man knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. This is but one of the many miracles that are recorded in the Gospels as performed by Jesus. Leprosy is the longest most stigmatising disease that has plagued mankind and still today is considered by some, though wrongly because of ignorance and superstition, as God's curse because of sin. According to Matthew Jesus had just preached his loftiest sermon from on a lofty and high place. Now that he came down to be with people with their physical, mental and spiritual problems, he put into action the selfless love, which he was preaching erstwhile. Jesus instantly cleansed and healed the man and restored his human dignity making him fit to become a member back in his community. This was Jesus' manner of dealing with the human situation. The word followed the deed, making the thing whole and integrated.

The above-mentioned passage is one of the many passages in the Bible, which leads us to the concept of biblical holism and holistic compassion and care to the needy people. The sermon, the advice, the word incarnated into deed. The Bible has no place for ivory-tower philosophising about God, but it is through and through incarnational and down-to-earth in its nature and approach. With it we approach to a deity who acts and intervenes in his creation, in human predicaments. God is what he does. The Bible both starts and concludes with the ideas of God's works.

The Bible says Jesus Christ is God-incarnate. He became incarnate to show before man the effulgence of God's grace and glory. In the New Testament in Greek, the language in which the New Testament was first written, the word for God's love is 'agape'. As distinct from other three Greek words for 'love' it means self-giving, unconditional and unmerited love. God so zealously loved mankind that he took human form and lived on this earth in the person of Jesus Christ. There is no more love than God's love for sinful people. His love pursues us for our own good even when we are disobedient to him.

True love acts, it's not passive. It is not merely any feeling. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that whosoever believe in him should not perish but have eternal life", wrote John in his most spiritual Gospel. The eternal Word, Wisdom and mind of God became incarnate in flesh and experienced all human experiences, excepting sin: humiliation, pain, suffering and sorrow, and eventually death. He descended from the highest heaven on to this sin-sick world where wayward man has perverted all kinds of relationships: man-man, man-nature, Divine-human. He came down from the glory of heaven as witness to God's love and forgiveness to transform and recreate the minds and hearts of man and restore all pristine human relationships that are marred due to sin.

So God's love is true love, which is not mere idealism and philosophical. Because it is incarnated in Christ it is not merely theological, but essentially theopractical. It declares that true love is the down-to-earth participation in God's outreach love by loving the people whom he loves. According to the Bible, man is God's image-bearer, however marred that original "image" might have become due to sin. The message of incarnation is that God became a human person to glorify humanity and bestow on man all of God's riches and blessing that man may live with fellow man and with God in right relationship both in time and eternity.

Love is authentically manifested and witnessed through action for and towards the object of love. That's why Jesus washed the dusty feet of his disciples, that's why he embraced and healed the leprosy-affected people, that's why he forgave sinners, forgave even those who were crucifying. As we, Christians, celebrate the birth of Christ one more time we need to internalise a theology of holism. The concept of Biblical Holism means that everything is within the knowledge and purpose of God. The central truth about Christianity is that God has taken action in his outreach love for fallen mankind through his Son Christ to redeem sinners and to reconcile them to himself. This reconciliation is, of necessity, should reflect in a right and just relationship among people, in their practical lives and conditions.

"Do what you say, and say what you do", said Gran Irvine, one former President of World Vision International. God's law in the Old Testament required people to do justice and righteousness in all human relationships.



So-called religious people were self-righteous during the Old Testament times, just as they are today. They boasted of their external religious activities, but did not have due regard for the well-being and the genuine human rights of the ordinary people.

According to the Bible to "know God" was to pursue justice for the poor and weak because God himself is right and just. There is no place of dichotomy or dualism in the Bible that separate physical from the spiritual, word from deed. Theology and ethics were intertwined with each other. It was always a holistic view. It was because of this that in the Ten Commandments God forbade the Israelite people to pronounce His holy name in vain. The idea was that if they did ever utter His name they would have to live according to His holy command to do justly and righteously. God said, "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." But lamentably so Israel failed God in many ways for the most part of its history as the Old Testament record says. But God being the God of mercy and steadfast love, a zealous God, He still promised to dwell with them. He had promised to send His Messiah, who would save not only the old Israelite people, but also anyone who believes in Him from all bondages of sin.

Through Jeremiah, a prophet of 6th Century B.C. God promised, "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will put my law in their minds and write them on their hearts, I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying 'Know the Lord', because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Jeremiah 31: 31-33). This was one of the clearest Old Testament promises about the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

In Christ we see our Creator and Redeemer God, who redeems the world from the pangs of sin and all its consequences. He came to redeem mankind from sin's captivity with all its implications, both temporal and eternal. He preached his first sermon at his Synagogue in Nazareth fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah about himself: "The Spirit of

the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke 4:18-19). Jesus' Good news concerns the need of the whole human person: it concerns spiritual, social, mental, physical and emotional needs of a person. So Jesus healed the sick, he fed the hungry, forgave sinners, cast out evil spirits from people possessed by the same just as he preached God's Word. The Gospel Jesus brought to the world is not merely a piece of good advice, but full of good news for the people who are afflicted, diseased, frustrated, broken-hearted, victimised, stigmatised, abused and sinned-against. They are too many in our world today.

Jesus put into practice and incarnated everything that he said. He is indeed the greatest Teacher for humanity for all times. In the Gospels Jesus is called and addressed as "Teacher" at least 45 times, but never a preacher. Christ embodied the truth about God and his grace in his person, his teaching and ministry. It is said that truth is caught more than it is taught.

All people need God's grace and love for a holistic life. Because we are all sinners and wayward people: in our thoughts, words and deed. The Bible declares that there is none without sin; and no one can please God by any human effort as everyone has fallen short of God's glory and his ethical or moral standard of righteousness. It is only through our humble submission to his holy will that we can come to him. Jesus embodied and unfolded God's unmerited love and grace; and he had compassion toward all men to restore them to true and full human dignity, the dignity that God gave man by creating him in his own image and likeness. It is God's intention for each man created in his image to live with human dignity and die with dignity. As we commemorate Christ's incarnation let us do our best to be just in all our actions and relationships with other people, love other people and be humble enough to consider the genuine rights of other people.

## Christmas comes to the world

SUNITA D' COSTA

Day gradually dipped in the west  
The weary farmer set home to rest  
Sun's and farmer's day peacefully passed.  
BUT.....  
The obedient young fighter chased terror  
Followed by constant horror  
Woe to the fighter, woe to his lot!  
How can Christmas come to someone shot?  
HEY.....  
Peace, peace, peace you yell  
All you do is open every door to hell  
Is this a way to dwell?  
COME ON.....  
Christmas comes not in this fashion  
Crush all arrogance, break this prison  
Open your heart, beckon in reason  
Swallow your pride, redirect your vision  
Learn to overpower the power of your gun  
Learn to grow from the farmer and the sun  
Learn from Christ to be humble and true  
Learn to glitter like the sun in the dew  
It will be Christmas for me and you.

## Christmas: Mystery and message

FATHER PATRICK GOMES

TODAY is Christmas: churches are beautifully decorated and a Christmas crib is placed where one can see the picture of cow-shed with the portrait (statue) of the new born baby Jesus along with devote mother Mary, and Saint Joseph. Shepherds going to meet the new born Saviour. Christmas liturgy is held in the decorated Church with mid-night Holy Mass. Churches are full with devotees. Christmas carols are being chanted or sung. Houses are also decorated people -- young and old -- are in their new dress and delicious cakes are prepared and shared in every family. All these festive and external aspects and characteristics are centered on a theological, and spiritual mystery of God revealed through the historical event of incarnation, that is, God the Divine Word coming to the world being born as a man. The Bible says: "The word became flesh and dwelt among us (Gospel of St. John 1:14).

The mystery of Christ's birth from the Biblical point of view: All major religions of the world are founded on the creed of a monotheistic belief -- one God who is almighty and creator of the whole universe where man is best of all creation. God who is always merciful to His own created mankind brings a message of hope of salvation in the form of a promise that contains curse to the devil (serpent) and blessing to mankind through a saviour who will come from a woman (cf. Old Testament: Genesis 3:15). The one who will come will be the new Messiah, meaning Saviour. He will establish a new messianic Kingdom.

Messianic promises in the Bible: Characteristics of the promised Messiah and messianic kingdom are proclaimed through the prophets. These messianic promises were very significant at the time of the prophetic period of the salvation history (500-300BC) as well as for the people of the present world and society. The oracle says that this messiah will come from a virgin: "The Lord himself will give you a sign. It is this: the maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'" (Prophet Isaiah 7:14). And his coming will bring the messianic kingdom into a reality where will prevail peace and harmony: "The wolves will live with the lamb, the panther lie down with the kid, calf and lion cub feed together

with a little boy to lead them. The cow and the bear will make friends, their young lie down together" Nation will not lift sword against nation, there will be no more training for war" (11:5-6; 2:4). Adding to these the Messiah will be a "Suffering Servant" will embrace unimaginable suffering but will finally be victorious.

Christ's Birth celebrated: Christmas celebration begins with four week preparation prior to 25 December. Liturgically this four-week time is called the Advent season when special Bible readings are taken during the community prayer service, the Holy Mass. The Christian community is spiritually cleansed receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation (also called Confession). The last 9 days of the advent season are climatic that lead the community to enter into the celebration of Christmas.

### From creation to life

God who became man defies us: God assumed a body from a virgin and, through a new creation, put on our own nature. We know he was a man,

formed from the same substance as we are. Right from his birth he undertook hard work, he went hungry and thirsty, he took rest and slept, he did not shirk suffering, he revealed the resurrection. In all these he offered his own self, so that when we suffer we would not lose heart, but rather would recognise that we are men, and would ourselves expect to receive what he received from God. Thus the birth of Jesus is hope, strength, happiness and joy for men in the midst of many sufferings in this temporal world. It is practical and significant particularly for the people of our country who undergo sufferings in many forms.

(2) Peace on earth: His birth brings peace to this world. Peace is the serene state of mind; peace is the pulse of love, the mother of unity. The birth of the prince of peace, Christ calls us to offer to God the Father the oneness of heart of peace-loving sons. The birthday of Jesus the Lord is the birthday of peace!

(3) He comes as a light: The nation that walked in darkness has seen a great light! The birth of Jesus takes away the darkness from this world. Call to the light is voiced strongly to this world. Darkness prevails when there are sins. Let us all be enlightened in heart and soul putting off from our nature all elements of darkness. (4) New life in newborn Jesus: Jesus is born to transform the sinful state of men. Therefore his birth invites us to put on a "new self"; to get rid of anger, passion, and hateful feelings. No insults or obscene talks must ever come from our lips. Christ's birth demands us not to lie to one another as we put on the new self.

(5) Building a culture of communion: God comes down to the earth only to be one with man. This brings a new relation between God and man. Here we find the extra-ordinary humility of God in order to bring men in communion with him which only pride can destroy. The newborn baby Jesus at Christmas calls men to get rid of any sort of pride, egoism, hedonism and embrace all in love and service, specially the poorest of the poor.

Conclusion: Christmas is a festival for all! In Bangladesh Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians live together. Any major religious festival of any community is felt and sensed by all. Today when Christians celebrate Christmas with much joy and happiness, friends of other religions too join them in spirit and in brotherly communion.



## A Child has been born!

DR. JAMES K. ROY

CHRISTMAS is the greatest festival of Christians all over the world no doubt. They celebrate this day enthusiastically and remember the circumstances of the birth of a child who was born in Bethlehem some two thousand years ago. At His birth the angel appeared to the shepherds and told them 'Do not be afraid. 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.' Luke 2:10-11.

Who is this Child? God has a plan to save the sinners and as a part of His saving plan He came to the world in a supernatural way and this is the mystery of Christmas. Scripture says, 'When the time had fully come, God sent his Son born of a woman, born under law.' Gal 4:4. Only the female agency were involved at His birth. His birth was foretold by Prophet Isaiah 'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) and He will also be called Immanuel which means God with

us.' Isaiah 7:14. He is the image of invisible God: God is spirit and the spirit has no flesh or bone (Luke 24:39) and He is invisible. Scripture says, 'No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son who is at the Father's side has made him known.' John 1:18. Jesus is described as the "exact representation of God, the image of God, and the image of the invisible God." The spirit of God that never permanently occupied a body or form before, took on the form of a man by becoming the person of Jesus Christ. He was no longer invisible, touchable, without form, now he dwelt among us. Both God Almighty and man: He born in Bethlehem as Jesus Christ.

Circumstances of His Birth: A son is known by his parents' name but in Jesus' case it is different. The word 'Jesus' is derived from Greek 'Iesosus' which means Jehovah Saviour and the word 'Christ' from Greek 'Christos' which means 'anointed'. The name has a special significance in the saving act of God and it was given by Him. Scripture says, God sent the angel Gabriel to a Virgin Mary to tell that she would be conceived by the Holy Spirit and she should give his name Jesus. Mary was



astonished and asked the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' Lk. 1:34.

Mary was espoused to a devout Joseph and when he heard that Mary was conceived before marriage, he was puzzled and planned to leave her secretly. While he was thinking of these, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.' Matt 1:20-21.

Is He the Son of God? As per our natural thought God cannot have a son but the Scripture says, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' John 3:16. At the time of His baptism the heavens opened and a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' Matt 3:17. The sonship of Jesus was predetermined in the mind and plan of God from eternity, but he did not really exist until he was born in Bethlehem. Jesus was God's son, his only son and he had a birthday which means there was a time when he did not exist. The spirit of God is eternal, without beginning or end but a man is not eternal. As a man, Jesus had a beginning. The humanity of Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins at Calvary. The spirit of the risen Christ, humanity and

divinity together will never end. The sonship of Jesus as mediator to the human race will no longer be necessary when there is no more sin, no more death, no more sorrow. Jesus will always be God's only begotten son.

How do we receive the child today? Christ will no longer be born in Bethlehem's inn but as the spirit He is still alive. When the child has been born he was not welcomed. The innkeeper was busy in taking care of the guests and making money so he could not provide a room for Mary and Joseph. We also spend a busy time as to show others. The shepherds were lower class people and rejected by the society but God broke the social barrier and told the good news of the Saviour who has been born. They were the privileged people to see and worship Lord Jesus. We could be privileged people when we are honest but the barriers in our life are money, pride, envy, etc. Herod did not want to lose his throne so he killed his wife and three sons and when it is contrary to our interest we do the same thing.

In conclusion, it may be said that our heart is not more than a manger, which is full of filth and Christ wants to be born here. When we open the door, he will enter and pouring His spirit, He will cleanse our heart. We have been weary and heavy laden because of sin and Christ wants to give us rest. The child who has been born promised eternal life for those who believe in Him and to the believers he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12.

## Miracles make it real

RICHARD TAPAS ADHIKARY

CELEBRATING Christmas is a massive joyful event: Jesus' image of a babe in the manger girdled in a circle of beaming rays; simple faces of the Eastern Magi greeting the new King in a wide high sky in cold and dark a brilliant star heralding the great message of Jesus' coming.

Christians have been celebrating the birth of Jesus since about 400 AD.

CHRIST means MESSIAH or ANOINTED ONE. It is the title awarded to Jesus. MASS is a name of religious festival. CHRISTMAS is a celebration over Jesus' birth inasmuch as His being the Saviour. Nevertheless, Christmas gradually loses this real meaning. In the West today children seek Father Christmas more than Jesus. Eating, drinking and merry making are getting upperhand in Christmas celebrations. Jesus' coming to earth

Blessings and miracles are almost resembling. Miracles have centred the birth of Jesus. They are the embodiment of God and shadow of a great part of His being. The Gospel of Luke of the New Testament gives out the tidings of the miraculous birth and life of Jesus.

The Holy Bible records many characters finding God's miracles for the faithful. Moses met miracles in carrying out a great responsibility of a dynamic leadership. Glorious miracles marked Abraham's life with a son named Isaac. Jesus' birth, works, death and resurrection are the miracles of some spectacular designs. Jonah learnt a lesson from God's miracle in Nineveh.

Before Jesus' coming to the lap of Mary and Joseph, God performed a brisk miracle. The aged couple of the Priest of Judea of Herod's kingship named Zacharias and his barren wife Elizabeth had met the miracle at an unprecedented stage of life. They were blessed with a son named John. God blessed this couple and favoured John to turn the nation towards God. John was filled with the Holy Spirit from mother's womb.

Miracles have the magnitude of believing Jesus' birth in billion's hearts. This is heralded to the ends of the world at once. Miracles have drawn men in millions and billions to throng to a single pulpit celebrating Christmas.

### The Son of God

Miracles have made the Holy Bible dazzling with brilliance. The Angel said to Mary that Holy Spirit has blessed her and the Holy One will be born of a

Holy Plan in a divine means. The Holy One will be called the Son of God. In the Son there lies the 'likeness' of God Himself. The 'Son' is what the 'Father' is, right in the Heaven.

Miracles are always great and magnanimous. Mary says, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God, my Saviour. Miracles are the exalting, a heading to a wide range of rejoice and ecstasy. Jesus' birth intimidates Herod's kingship of tyranny and darkness. Herod was scared. Jealousy ruled him to kill the newborns. Herod signifies one of the despots, a power always nullifying kingship of love which is God's sovereign quality.

### Salvation

Ridiculous it is that the king was born in a stable as there was no refuge in men's abode. Doubly ridiculous it is to know that this very king was adorned with a crown of thorns at Crucifixion. Jesus is a king who has no soldier. He prays alone, not in anyone's reach of vision. He is a starving soul casting life in writing God's Salvation in man's heart. He never flees away when killers nab. He is the first noted Holy Spirit. He is now the resurrected saviour.

All these impressions have mandated God's works of miracles, the miracles of joy and hope revealed in His promises that the Book of Isaiah bears. God has done the greatest thing in the smallest form. Jesus was born in a stable, far from human abode, tempered with optimum simplicity.

Miracles are manifold and multitude seen in Jesus' ministry for His heavenly Father. He healed lepers, sighted the sightless, returned life to the dead. He struck the storms, expelled the evil spirit and saved the victims of injustice. The jobs are countless and marveling. He paved the path of Salvation.

### Jesus' metaphysical kingdom

The Cross of Jesus is not signifying postures. His Cross is a remote star to the material worshippers. Jesus' Cross cannot give a strong economy, a stable political system, a sound health culture, bound to this earth. The Cross lies in the metaphysical submission, not physical. Christianity is not material. Jesus' Cross culture never propagates any social system that men could be lured to and fond of. The Cross is Godly, infinite and immaterial. Material life is short lived and short sighted, laden with many hopes of pleasures,

most in vain. Jesus' kingdom is a soul's kingdom. Nothing wanes here. Heart and treasure stays at a single point. Jesus emphasizes (in Matthew Chapter 6 from verse 19 to 21) "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures of earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be."

This is why Christians do not morally claim any possession. They cannot limit God because Jesus delimited His love for all mankind by Salvation on sacrificing on the Cross. Christianity is subjective, not collective, in preserving a close tie with God. It is qualitative, not quantitative. It never claims any collective worldly possessiveness. It makes clear that Christianity is believed to be genuine not by name or family but by faith in Jesus Christ, the Saviour. But where are those Christians? Who will see the great miracles surrounding Jesus?

### Celebrating Christmas

Christmas around the world has various colourful celebrations. Special Christmas cuisines are predominant everywhere. People from all over the world send letters to Santa Claus in Finland. In the north of Finland there is a big tourist theme park titled Christmas Land. There are three holy days of Christmas. They are Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day. The Latvians believe Father Christmas brings presents on each of the twelve days of Christmas and put under the family Christmas Tree. In Germany Christmas Father brings presents in the late afternoon of Christmas Eve on 24 December after joining Church services. Most homes of the Germans have also little wooden 'cribs' which is a small model of wooden stable where Jesus was born. Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus and animals are attractions. Candle lighting is an outstanding aspect on each of the four Sundays titled 'Advent' before Christmas Day. The Russian Orthodox Churches use the old 'Julian' calendar to celebrate Christmas.

They may celebrate on 25 December or on 7 of January. In Sweden Christmas Eve is the most important time. And like elsewhere Father Christmas gives presents to Children on Christmas Eve in Portugal. And celebrating Christmas in the USA is the most striking and spectacular phenomenon.

## The stars look down

MIRIAM ROY (JUI)

In the idle hours,  
When the mind ponders  
The trials and tribulations of the day  
The stars look down.

Everywhere is darkness  
The heart sinks in pain  
Mary suffers for the pain,  
No hope for the better tomorrow!  
Then very high from the skies  
The stars look down.

It is so lonely  
With crowds everywhere,  
The soul longs for someone  
That's our Saviour Jesus Christ  
Born in the manger in cold winter night  
Then very high from the skies  
The stars look down.

The morning light melts the stars  
Everyone cheering for the Birth  
The eyes dream once again.  
Celebrating the festival of Christmas  
Life is lured by hopes,  
Then very high from the skies  
The stars still look down.