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A Journey of Faith

For unto us a
Child
is
Born

Isaiah 9:6



Christmas Isn't....

Christmas isn't about gulping
down cake after cake,

It's about taking efforts to
save those going to that lake,

The lake of fire,
about which Jesus often spake,

Where those without Christ will go,
deceived by that Snake.

Christmas isn't about wearing to Church,
the best dress in town,

It's about demonstrating,
the story of the One who came down,

To save everyone – white, black,
yellow or brown,

Everyone who would,
in their lives, Jesus crown!

Dr. Duke Jeyaraj



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Editorial 



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

THREATS TO THE SEASON OF PEACE AND GOODWILL

India, we hope, will not miss out on the Spirit of Christmas. It is the season of goodwill on earth, among men, women, and children. It is to celebrate the birth and ministry of one who taught us not to make a difference between Jew and Gentile, between women and men. And between those who thought of themselves to have been born in families of priests and of kings, and the humbler ones whose lot it was to labour as carpenter and cobbler, fisherman and bread-maker, and the men who stood day and night collecting toll from people on the highway.

And yet, as Christmas

approached, the Church in India felt the pressure of hate-mongers, some in positions close to the king's court, and others who thought because they had mighty arms, it was their right to persecute the weak and the meek, and the different.

Those who governed sent out their minions to survey churches, halls of worship and homes where neighbours collected to hear the Word of God. Self-appointed private armies set forth looking for newly baptised faithful and their pastors, as others lobbied with the government to outlaw the entire freedom to choose one's faith.





Over the last seven decades, nine states have in fact made it all but impossible to lawfully follow the faith of their choice. The southern state of Karnataka, known for its climate and its cutting-edge technology, threatens to become the tenth state in a nation or 30 provinces to bring law abridging the freedom of religion.

The community is not in panic. Its strong faith is surety of that. But it is apprehensive. Over the years, the Christmas season has seen sporadic incidents of violence. They remember that carollers singing songs heralding the birth of baby Jesus were waylaid and beaten, and then rounded up and taken to prison. It may perhaps not come to that. But there have been beatings and assaults, on churches and on pastors. In one case in the state of Karnataka, it was the women in the church who stood up to the goons, bravely as the women of the Old Testament.

According to media reports, the Commissioner of Bastar in Chhattisgarh, Mr. Govindram Churendra, has issued controversial guidelines to the subordinate district magistrates which translates as: "Make a list of all villages, families and persons from other communities

who might be lured by Christians to convert." And "Bring back people, who have converted to Christianity, to the original community through brotherhood and goodwill," and "Initiate campaigns for people who have not yet converted so that they continue to believe in their traditions, gods and goddesses and rituals," (translated from a Hindi media article quoting the guidelines).

These guidelines come after Mr. Sunil Sharma, the Superintendent of Police of the Sukma district in the same state, ordered surveillance of Christian missionaries in the heavily forested tribal areas in July this year.

According to media reports, the official letter that was issued said, "The Christian missionaries and the tribal Christians are routinely venturing in internal areas of the district and persuading the non-Christian tribals to get converted by enticing and offering them allurements. Owing to this, the situation resulting into a conflict between the local tribals and those converted (to Christianity) can't be ruled out."

This clearly exhibits a bias in the government apparatus against





one community and makes it clear that an agenda is being pushed.

The adjoining state of Madhya Pradesh too remains tense after the Sub Divisional Officer (Revenue) of Thandla and Meghnagar issued orders to prohibit Christian assemblies and weekly worship service that had no permission from the district magistrate on the allegation that conversions take place. The idea that Churches must take permission from the District Magistrate to meet every week for worship is a direct affront on the values of the constitution.

The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh added to the growing list of concerns by recently directing various Collectors, Commissioners, and Inspector General of Police to identify non-government organisations in the state that are getting foreign funding and are breaking society and indulging in conversion. Without naming any organisation in particular, the Chief Minister said that there is no place for any NGO in the state that engages in religious conversions. Since he did not use the word forcible or fraudulent, does the Chief Minister mean that conversions per se are illegal? That is not

what the constitution tells us.

In Karnataka in south India, news of a proposal to survey "official as well as unofficial churches and bible societies aimed at preventing alleged religious conversions" surfaced in the first half of the month of October. The proposal was backed by Mr. Goolihatti Shekar, BJP legislator from Hosadurga and the Acting Chairman of the Committee on the Welfare of Backward Classes and Minorities. Mr. Shekar claimed that even his mother had been converted. However, on 28th October it was reported that the state government put a hold on the survey.

Following this the Karnataka government ordered the Department of Minorities Welfare to provide information about people who have converted to another religion in the past 25 years while the Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai made known his plan to bring an anti-conversion law during the winter session of the Karnataka legislative assembly to be held at the Suvarna Vidhan Soudha Belagavi from 13th December 2021. He confirmed to news reporters that the draft law will be influenced by similar laws in other states particularly Uttar Pradesh.





Recommendations were issued to the Department of Minorities Welfare that they should gather information about religious conversions in coordination with the Police Department, Revenue Department, Social Welfare Department, district commissioners, and chief executive officers. The information was to be submitted within 30 days.

Media outlets have also reported that on 16th October, Karnataka's Intelligence Department issued an order to top police and intelligence officials to gather information about "authorised and unauthorised" churches in Karnataka.

In the Hosdurga taluk, the Tehsildar had issued orders on 4th October asking revenue officials to conduct a "door-to-door" inspection to find "Hindus who have converted to Christianity." This exercise was sanctioned by the District Collector of Chitradurga and seems to have been triggered by "WhatsApp and Facebook messages", and "concerns raised" by the BJP sitting MLA in the constituency, Goolihatti Shekhar. The order states that the MLA "believes Christian

missionaries throughout the taluk are luring Hindus and converting them to Christianity".

All this points to a massive intelligence gathering on the Christian community in the state just before tabling the anti-conversion bill.

Targeted hate almost invariably leads to violence. The state has seen multiple attacks in the past few days targeting worship services and Christians in general.

Persecution of this nature happens across India. Attacks on Christians have been increasing particularly in the poll bound state of Uttar Pradesh which clearly leads the tally in the number of attacks against the Christian community this year as well.

Pastors and lay Christian leaders are being targeted and implicated under sections of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act 2021 in a major way and many of them have to spend weeks in jail before they can be bailed out.

Evangelical Fellowship of India has written to the Government of India and the various State Governments and appealed to





them to provide security to the community so that Christmas remains peaceful for all.

But more needs to be done to highlight the way in which the community seems to be at the receiving end of the hatred that comes from divisive ideologies and political polarization. Governments in the states and at the Centre must protect not just the minorities but the Constitution of the country which guarantees equality under law, and the freedom to profess, practice and propagate the faith of one's choice

With Civil Society, the church is reminding political groups, state apparatus and the law-and-order system what the Prime Minister and the Supreme Court of India have assured our countrymen - religious freedom for everyone.

At the same time, a campaign to educate the masses so that disinformation and propaganda against the Church can be countered is a must. Christian

leaders at all levels must be trained in their rights and in the laws of the land, so that they can respond positively to any attacks and propaganda.

For this, efforts towards building Christian unity must be redoubled. The community must also engage with civil society, especially at the grassroots and speak for others when their rights are violated.

As Church in India, our hope remains in Christ, who alone builds the Church. We must take solace in our knowledge that Jesus takes the attacks against His Body personally. The important thing is to persevere with Him and respond in ways that will bring glory to Him.

Rejoicing in our faith, we wish each other a Merry Christmas. Peace and Goodwill among women and men of our country, India.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal

"I am the good shepherd.
The good shepherd lays down
his life for the sheep."

- John 10:11





CHRISTMAS FOR THE CORONA BEREAVED PEOPLE OF GOD

Dr. Sanjay Avinash Mall

Christmas is a season for which we wait for through the year. During my informal interactions with people during the Christmas season, I very often say that I have three problems with Christmas. First it comes once a year, it comes at the end of the year and before we realize, it has come and gone. For us, Christmas is a time when the entire family gets together for a time of thanksgiving also. A lot of our family discussions focus on the planning of Christmas celebrations after September.

This year however, has been a very different one for people of all faiths across the world. The number of people who perished during the second wave left all of us overwhelmed. Death did not

spare the young or the old. It did not spare those in high positions either. For the first time, there were waiting lists at the graveyards and crematoriums for the people to perform the last rites of their loved ones who had died of the virus. Many of the people who died were those on whose treatment life savings had been spent. On seeing the seriousness of the situation, banks have made it compulsory for the names of children to be included as nominees in the bank accounts.

I know some very young people including newly married ones who have died this year leaving behind very young wives, husbands and small children. As I write this article, my thoughts are





drawn towards them. What will this first Christmas mean for them in the absence of their loved ones. Not only this Christmas but all their Christmases, birthdays and wedding anniversaries will now be without their fathers and mothers, wives and husbands. In some situations, the affected people may pick up the threads of life by entering into matrimony again. However, children who have been orphaned will not have that option available to them. One bitter fact that the people will not forget come what may is that, this pandemic stole their family happiness once and for all time to come.

Normally, the first Christmas after the death of the loved family member is a very difficult one. I too went through this experience after the demise of my mother and father in two consecutive years. As human beings, we all have our ways of handling our grief. In some families, the traditional Christmas cakes will not be baked. Homes will not be decorated, and the Christmas tree may not be decorated. New clothes may not be worn on that particular Christmas morn. People make a beeline for the cemetery, once the church

service is over to pay floral tributes to their loved ones. Copious tears are shed for the people who are no longer with us.

The question is how can we help such people feel better at this time. Upholding them in prayer is one way of supporting them. Visiting them at their homes during the week with some gifts is another way of conveying to them that we know how they feel and care for them. Inviting them on Christmas Day for a meal together is also a very good way of showing love and concern for them. By our doing these small acts of kindness, they will not receive their dead back but our small gesture will make them feel better.

We also need to help them understand that death is not the end of everything. How much sense this would make to them is something we do not know. The question that would be upper most in their minds is why did God not heal their loved ones. One of my former pastor would put it across this way. God heals in two ways. In the first case, He takes the disease away from the person. In the second instance, He takes the person away from





the disease. Thus, God heals in both ways. When God takes the person away from the disease, the healing is full and final. We need to convey to them gently that Jesus is our Mighty God, He is our Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. He knows how people feel. He is also the God of the fatherless and the widow. This is something from which people can draw a lot of solace and strength. At the same time, we also need to uphold our friends and colleagues and community members in prayer who have lost their loved ones during the year due to reasons of health or anything else.

While we may be preparing ourselves for Christmas let us put ourselves in their shoes and give

them a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on and encourage them that God understands how they feel. He is the same God who had wept at the tomb of Lazarus. For those of us whom God has brought us safely through the year, let us go back and thank Him for all His mercies and commit ourselves into His Hands for the New Year.



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Now this is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

- John 17:3





The Word Became Flesh

Rev. Dr. David Mende

Introduction

Let me begin this article with a simple Bible quiz: Where was Jesus born? Answer: In Bethlehem. When did Jesus come to this world? Answer: More than 2000 years ago. These questions are pretty easy to answer, isn't it? In which books of the Bible is the genealogy of Jesus mentioned? Answer: Matthew and Luke. However, John 1:1-3 mentions the genealogy, or to be more precise, the origins of Christ. I have entitled this article as "**The Word Became Flesh.**"

In John 1:1-3, we see that Christ, who existed from eternity past and through whom all things are made, became flesh and dwelt among us. We need to understand that Jesus didn't

come into existence 2000 years ago. Many unbelievers and even some nominal Christians wrongly assume that Jesus came into existence 2000 years ago. But John tells us that Jesus is the eternal God. He has no beginning or end. In fact, he is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. Even as we celebrate the birth of our Lord, let's remember three important truths from John 1:1-3.

1. The Word Existed From Eternity Past (Jn 1:1-2).

a. The Word was in the beginning (v. 1).

The opening phrase "in the beginning" echoes the opening words in Genesis 1:1. Matthew and Luke open with the genealogy of Jesus. Even John





opens with the genealogy or origins of Jesus and says that Jesus is eternal. John refers to Jesus as "the Word." The Greek word is *logos*.

Why does John refer to Christ as "the Word"? The term *logos* had a significant meaning for both the Jews and the Greeks. Let me talk about the Jewish understanding of *logos* first. For a Jew, a word was something that had an independent existence. A word could accomplish some things. For example, when we read the creation account in the book of Genesis (1:3, 6, 11), we see that God created the world through his "word." So, the word of God is the creative power.

When we read the rest of the Old Testament, we understand that the word of God is creative, active, and dynamic. For instance, Psalm 33:6 says, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host." Even the apocryphal books (2 Esdras 6:38 and Wisdom of Solomon 9:1) mention that the word is powerful and creative. Also, in the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (Targums), the Jews substituted "God" with "the word of God" to avoid

anthropomorphism (speaking about God as a human). So, the Jews knew that the phrase "the word of God" referred to God himself.

But the term *logos* had another meaning. *Logos* means not just a word, but it also means reason. Also, in the wisdom literature, particularly in Proverbs 8:22-30, we see that wisdom had eternal existence. Further, this wisdom had creative and illuminating power. William Barclay says that in some of the apocryphal books, wisdom is presented as "the eternal, creative power which was at God's side in the days of creation and the beginning of time."

One of the apocryphal books, Wisdom of Solomon, equates wisdom with the word. Barclay summarizes the Jewish understanding of the "word" by saying, "So when John was searching for a way in which he could commend Christianity he found in his own faith and in the record of his own people the idea of the word, the ordinary word which is in itself not merely a sound, but a dynamic thing, the word of God by which God created the world, the word of the Targums which expressed the





very idea of the action of God, the wisdom of the Wisdom Literature which was the eternal creative and illuminating power of God."

Now let me talk about the Greek understanding of *logos*. According to Greek philosophy, *logos* controlled everything in the universe and made sure that it is in order rather than being chaotic. Also, the Greeks believed that *logos* ensured that all the events in the world had a purpose and a plan. Further, they also taught that *logos* gave the ability to humans to judge what is right and wrong. So, for the Greeks, *logos* was nothing less than the mind of God which controlled the world and all the humans in that world.

Jesus is the fulfilment of the longing of both the Jews and the Greeks. Even our Indian sages prayed: *Asato ma sadgamaya, tamaso ma jyotirgamaya, mrtiyorma amrtam gamaya* (meaning, Lead me from falsehood to the truth. Lead me from darkness to light. Lead me from death to immortality). This prayer is fulfilled in Christ alone, who is the truth, the light of this world, and the resurrection and the life! Jesus is the living bread. We receive complete spiritual satisfaction in Christ alone. We

need not search for spiritual fulfilment and satisfaction elsewhere.

John says that the Word that was from the beginning is the Lord Jesus Christ. John says that this Word has always existed. The Word is not a created thing. John is emphasizing the preexistence of Christ here. As Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn 8:58). Jesus didn't come into existence 2000 years ago. He has always existed as the second person in the Trinity from eternity past. We can fathom a billion (100 crores) or a trillion (1 lakh crore) years, but our brains cannot fathom eternity. Jesus is eternal! But he came down to this earth as a human more than 2000 years ago.

b. From the beginning, the Word was with God (vv. 1-2).

This Word was with God right from the beginning. The Greek word for "with" is *pros* which literally means "towards." It talks about the intimate relationship and fellowship between the Father and the Son. If you want to know someone, the best thing to do is to approach a person who is very close to this person. You can't know about a person by talking to a mere acquaintance.





Since Jesus has been with the Father since eternity past, he alone can reveal God to us completely. Jesus can reveal what God is like, what his will is, and what his heart is. As John later says in verse 18, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side (Greek: in this bosom of the Father), he has made him known." Jesus reveals the Father completely because he knows him fully.

c. The Word was God (v. 1).

John declares that "the Word was God." Jehovah's Witnesses, in their *New World Translation*, translate this phrase as "the Word was a god" since the definite article is not there in the original Greek in this particular phrase. However, there is no definite article in the original Greek text for the word "God" in Matthew 5:9, 6:24, Luke 1:35, 75, John 1:6, 12, 13, 18, Romans 1:7, 17. But the *New World Translation* translates it as "God" instead of "a god" in the above-mentioned verses. There's no consistency in their spurious translation.

John 1:1 teaches that Jesus is God and it also teaches that he is distinct from the Father. Several other Scriptures affirm the deity

of Christ (Jn 1:18; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 Jn 5:20). Jesus is not merely a teacher or a prophet; he is God Almighty! The Bible teaches that one God exists in three distinct persons (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and each person is fully God. So, the Word, Jesus existed from eternity past.

2. All Things Were Made Through the Word (John 1:3).

John emphasizes that "all things were made through him." Then, he goes on to say, "and without him was not any thing made that was made." The Gnostics believed that matter was evil. As a result, they didn't believe that this world was created by God. But John says that "all things" were created by Christ. Later, in verse 10, he says, "the world was made through him." In Colossians 1:16, Apostle Paul says, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him." This vast universe demonstrates that there must be a glorious and awesome Creator! Since Christ created this universe, it means that we must be good stewards of his creation. The Lord is going to





renew this creation at his second coming (2 Pet. 3:12-13).

3. The Eternal Word Became Flesh (Jn 1:14).

Instead of writing that the Word became a "man" or a "body," John says that "the Word became flesh." The word "flesh" (Greek: *sarx*) refers to human frailty. John is probably attacking the docetic teaching that Jesus was not fully man. So, John announces, "And the Word became flesh." These words must have shocked both the Jews and the Greeks! The Greeks worshipped gods who were merely super-human. But they elevated the logos. John is telling the Greeks that the same logos who made and ordered the universe became flesh.

The Jews emphasized the transcendence of God. John's words must have come as a shock to many Jews. God who created the entire universe through the power of his word became flesh! Jesus became human, yet he remained God (Phil. 2:6-7). The invisible became visible. The infinite became finite. The eternal became temporal. The immortal died for our sins. People take great pains to go for pilgrimages to meet their gods. But the great

news is that God came down to meet us! We don't have to go anywhere to find him. He came down to find us.

a. He "tabernacle" among us.

Jesus pitched his tabernacle among us. In the Old Testament, through the tabernacle, God dwelt among his people in the wilderness (Exod. 25:8-9; 40:34-35; Jn 1:14). But now God dwells among his people through the incarnate Christ. He is Immanuel, God with us (Mt. 1:23)!

b. His glory is seen by his people.

The word "seen" (*Greek: theaomai*) means "look closely." The phrase, "and we have seen his glory" alludes to Exodus 33:12-34:28. In the Exodus passage, God's glory is equated with his goodness (Exod. 33:18-19). John says that he and the disciples of Christ saw the glory of Christ (Jn 2:11, when Jesus performed his first sign; Lk. 9:32, at the transfiguration).

1. *This glory is of the only Son who came from the Father.*

This glory is of that of the unique Son, Jesus Christ. Just as Isaac was the unique son of Abraham (Heb. 11:17), Jesus is the unique





Son of God. Christ has a unique relationship with the Father.

2. He came with full of grace and truth.

Jesus' glory is described as "full of grace and truth." In Exodus 34:6, God's glory is described as "love and faithfulness" (also see Ps. 26:3; Prov. 16:16), which is a description of God's goodness. There, "love" (*Hebrew: hesed*) refers to gracious covenant love and the word "faithfulness" (*Hebrew: emet*) means "faithful words" or "truth." So, John is saying essentially the same thing that Exodus 33:12-34:28 says. Both Moses and John saw the same glory! God's glory, that is God's goodness/his loving character, is fully revealed in Christ! John 12:23-24 shows that the revelation of God's glory is demonstrated on the cross, thereby demonstrating God's amazing love through the incarnation and death of his Son. In Jesus, we see the full manifestation of God's grace and truth!

Conclusion

The main message from this article is: **We must worship Christ because he is the eternal Word who became flesh.**

Jesus is not merely a prophet or a great teacher. He is the eternal God, the second person in the Trinity. As we celebrate Christmas, let's worship Christ for who he is!

P.S. This article is adapted from Dr. David Mende's book, *Good News of Great Joy!* You may contact him on 9848004094 for copies of this book.



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JESUS WITH US

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy



While I was in college, I revolted at celebrating Christmas. That was because I saw the celebrations as not glorifying the Lord Jesus. It was all about people decorating their homes, eating lots of goodies, having parties and getting gifts. Around that time, I came across a paraphrase of lines penned originally by Angelus Silesius:

Though Christ a thousand times
In Bethlehem be born,
If He's not born in thee
Thy soul is still forlorn
After reading those words, I felt
that I was right to revolt.

After I became a pastor, I realised the importance of using celebrations as a teaching tool. The Christian Calendar takes people through the different

phases of the history of God's activity on the human stage. However, the old rebel in me never died. "Jesus is the reason for the season", became the theme and thrust of my preaching about Christmas and Easter.

God with Us

Traditionally, at Christmas we celebrate "God with us". We like that. The whole idea that God Almighty is with us is very uplifting. Matthew is the apostle who recorded that the other name for Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us (1:23). He closed the gospel with Christ's promise that He would be with disciples always: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising





them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (28:18-20). Most people hang on to the last line. We love it that Jesus is with us to aid us and protect us. Oh, yes, what a glorious thought! So, let's party on. It's Christmas.

Mostly, we choose to ignore the fact that our Lord made that promise to be with us for the express purpose of disciples representing Him to others. How are we doing? Do people see Jesus-with-us? (I use Jesus-with-us as the name of our Lord instead of just Jesus).

Discrimination

A beggar came asking for food. The householder told him to go around to the back door and asked him to sit on the floor while he went in to bring leftovers. Putting the food in front of the beggar, the householder said, "Let's pray. Repeat after me, 'Our Father in Heaven'." Instead, the beggar said, "Your Father in Heaven". The householder said, "No, say, 'OUR Father in Heaven'." The beggar again said,

"Your Father in Heaven." The householder got really angry. He asked, "Why do you keep on saying, 'Your' Father when I tell you to say 'Our' Father?" The man said, "Sir, it's like this. If I say Our Father, then I would be your brother. If we are brothers, you would invite me in through the front door and not the back; you would ask me to sit at your dining table not on the floor; and you would not give me stale food. Sir, it's not possible that we are sons of the same father. God may be your Father, but he can't be OUR father."

That is of course a made-up story. No beggar would dare to talk back like that. But the writer of the story has a point, doesn't he? What this writer said in story form is described as having actually happened in the Early Church.

"My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose, a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor





man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not **discriminated** among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (Jas. 2:1-4). And Jesus-with-us says, "Judge not, so that you are not judged" (Matt. 7:1).

Not Classy

Christians have always had a problem dealing with those who don't belong to our class. Do you think Jesus of old (or Jesus-with-us) belongs to our class?

All the paintings and pictures of Jesus that we display on the walls of our homes portray Him as a rather good-looking guy. We're proud to have His pictures in our homes. However, according to Scripture, the Servant of the Lord didn't look good at all. He had no beauty or majesty. He wasn't attractive. He was an undesirable (Isa. 53:2).

After all, Jesus was from the low class. He grew up in a daily-wage labourer's home. He fitted in with the poor of the land. He definitely wasn't fit for polite society or the company of aristocrats and sophisticates. When rich people saw Jesus, all they saw was a low class person. By the time He was

thirty, He was darkened by the sun He had laboured under. His hands were rough, not soft like the manicured hands of someone who lived a pampered life and didn't have to work with his hands. There was dirt under His fingernails. You get the picture. He did the work of a servant. He belonged to the servant class.

If Jesus had come in our time, how would we treat Him? That's not the question to ask. How do we treat Jesus-with-us today? That's the question because the Bible says that that old low class Jesus is still with us: "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

James equated discrimination with judgementalism! When we put down people, when we classify them as low class, we are being judgemental. It is a fact that those who are better off make character judgements about those who are poor: They are lazy. They are dishonest. They try to take advantage of our goodness. They are ungrateful. Our list of complaints is endless, when it comes to judging those who are underprivileged and have a subordinate role in our lives.





Immorally Nice

Our Lord told the story of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. The rich man was very rich and lived in luxury. He dressed extravagantly in purple and dined sumptuously. The man was not an immoral man according to the sacred law of Jews. Legally, he was not guilty of any crime. He was not a robber, a murderer or an adulterer. In that sense, he was a good man. He didn't trouble anyone. He didn't exploit anyone. He didn't abuse anyone. However, according to the Lord's story, in the end, the man was found wanting. He had lived without a care, and his sin was that he didn't care. He hadn't cared for the beggar at his gate. Whenever he had gone in and out of the gate, he would have seen Lazarus, but he went past him without any sign of having seen the miserable man.

Lazarus chose that spot outside the rich man's gate for good reason. He wanted to get the crumbs from the rich man's table. He came to the gate daily, and he was ignored daily. The rich man could have easily sent Lazarus leftovers and scraps. But he didn't. From his point of view, he had good reason. He didn't want

his servants to get contaminated by any contact with the filthy and diseased beggar. Maybe he also felt that if the servants were to take food to the beggar, it would be from time that they should be serving him. After all, that was what they were paid for – not to do charity for no-good beggars.

When I was in school, walking past temples, mosques and Roman Catholic churches, I observed there were hordes of beggars waiting for worshippers to come out after prayers. On the other hand, outside Protestant churches it wasn't customary to see beggars. Are we known to be less charitable than others that beggars don't waste their time outside our churches?

Solid Excuses

Of course, we have solid excuses for how we conduct ourselves. We don't want to encourage begging because that would make our city look bad – it would make us look bad. Our stance is that when there are homes for the destitute, beggars should be there – confined.

First of all, those places are not homes. They are just institutions without a heart. Who wants to be





in loveless places? Second, there are not enough of them for the huge numbers of beggars. Third, it is well-known that the institutions maintained by the government are ill-run and mismanaged. The inmates are often deprived (nay, robbed) of the aid that comes for them. The managers and workers take the benefits, leaving very little for the intended beneficiaries. Lastly, the beggars (and women in women's homes, children in children's homes, mentally disabled in asylums) are often exploited and sexually abused.

In the end, insisting beggars should be confined is all about putting people in their place. We determine where the underprivileged belong. That's what happened in the church that James described in his letter. A poor man was humiliated and made to sit on the floor at the feet of the elders. A rich man was treated well and honoured (2:1-7).

Being Middle Class

The COVID 19 pandemic has shown how cruel cultured and polished people can be to those who are poorer. Sara does the cleaning work in an apartment

building. With bus services being suspended, she was having difficulty getting to work. She asked if she could attend to her duties on alternate days. She was told that she would lose her job if she did that. Then the second worker stopped turning up. Sara was ordered to take on other worker's load also. When Sara asked if she would be paid for doing the extra work, she was told that she would have to do double-duty for the same pay that she was getting. There are many Christian apartment owners in the building. But no one fought for her rights. Their excuse was that they couldn't "spoil the system". That is a common Middle Class argument that has been in use for years and years.

During the Emergency imposed by the late Indira Gandhi, the Lucknow Municipal Corporation introduced a rate card for what cycle-rickshaw pullers could charge. The rickshaws are made to seat only two. However, a family of four or five or six would take just one rickshaw. So too would a group of three or four big hulks. All of these people would pile into a rickshaw plied by a scrawny man and insist on paying according to the rate card for





carrying two passengers. The officials who made the rate-card were Middle Class folks. They were taking care of themselves and their kind.

Barbara Ehrenreich, an American author and political activist, went undercover for three months working for minimum wages as a waitress, hotel maid, house cleaner, nursing-home aide, and Wal-Mart clerk. At the end of her experiment, she wrote her book *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (2001). *The New Yorker* said it was an "exposé" putting "human flesh on the bones of such abstractions as 'living wage' and 'affordable housing'." What she wrote about America could well be said about the situation in India: "When someone works for less pay than she can live on...she has made a great sacrifice for you...The 'working poor'... are in fact the major philanthropists of our society. They neglect their own children so that the children of others will be cared for; they live in substandard housing so that other homes will be shiny and perfect; they endure privation so that inflation will be low and stock prices high. To be a member of

the working poor is to be an anonymous donor, a nameless benefactor, to everyone."

In Bible times there was no Middle Class. People were either rich or poor. The overall message of the Bible is that God favours the poor. Our Lord's parable about Lazarus and the rich man is an example. It is significantly different from all the other parables – there is a named character. The poor man is given an identity, while the rich man was unnamed. (In Sunday School, you may have heard the rich man being referred to as Dives. However, that was not his name. "Dives" is just the Latin for "rich man"). By giving the poor man a name, the subliminal teaching of our Lord was that people who are poor and needy are not to be clubbed together as faceless masses.

Flamboyant Shashi Tharoor infamously referred to the "cattle class", though at the time, he was only saying that he would travel second class like ordinary folks – something all politicians do when they hit their election campaign trail. The use of that term shows how the well-to-do regard poorer people. They look down on them.





God's Poor

The book of Proverbs, which is full of practical wisdom, says that the mark of the righteous is that they care for those who are poor (29:7). People are counselled:

Speak up for those who cannot
speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are
destitute.

Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor
and needy (31:8-9).

In Proverbs, God is seen identifying Himself with poor people. Whatever people do to those who are poor, they do it to God, says Proverbs:

Whoever oppresses the poor
shows contempt for their Maker,
but whoever is kind to the
needy honours God (14:31)
Whoever mocks the poor shows
contempt for their Maker (17:5)
Whoever is kind to the poor
lends to the Lord,
and he will reward them for
what they have done (19:17).

Jesus-with-us said the same thing. "Whatever you have done for the least of my brothers (and sisters) you have done for me" (Matt. 25:40) and whatever was not done for the least was not done for Jesus-with-us (v.45). When you know someone is

underfed (compared to yourself), ill-clad (compared to yourself), friendless (without influential connections like you) what do you do to Jesus-with-us?

While Matthew recorded Jesus as having said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." (5:3), Luke said that Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor..." (6:20). No doubt, the Lord was addressing disciples. The point is that Jesus deliberately chose poor people to be His disciples.

When Paul became the apostle to Gentiles, the terms of his mission included the mandate that he was not to forget or neglect the poor (Gal. 2:10).

But right in the first century, as James' letter points out, the Church went wrong and started to favour the rich. Sadly, even after an apostle confronted the spiritual immorality right then and there, the Church down through the ages has continued to show favouritism toward well-to-do people.

John wrote to the Church that Christians should be willing to lay down their lives for brothers and sisters (1 Jn. 3:16). As people





heard that read in church, they would have glibly thought to themselves, "Oh, yeah, I am willing to lay my life down" simply because there was no immediate need to do so. But John didn't allow them time to congratulate themselves for having sacrificial intentions. While they were revelling in their feeling of being good, his next words made them face up to reality: "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" (v.17). Proof of our willingness to sacrifice our lives is in our willingness to sacrifice our

material goods to bless someone in need. That is the bottom line.

It's Christmas. What will you do with Jesus-with-us? What will you do for Jesus-with-us? What will you do to Jesus-with-us?



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"These things I have spoken to you,
so that in Me you may have peace
In the world you have tribulation,
but take courage;
I have overcome the world."

- John 16:33





THE BABY OF THE MANGER

Rev. Richard Masih



Introduction:

An angel had given the good news of the birth of 'a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2:11 ESV) to the shepherds. Later, he gave them a sign how they would recognise him once they found him, "For this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger" (V.12 ESV).

We sing a Christmas song which goes like this, "Away in a manger, no crib (cradle) for His bed, the little Lord Jesus, lay down His sweet head."

Who is this baby of the manger or in the manger? Why should we celebrate his birthday? What he has to do with us? Or, what we have to do with him? Let's have a look at the baby in the manger-

I. He is the Son of God.

A. Prophesied by the 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 Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

B. Professed by God the Father.

1. At the time of his baptism.

"As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:16-17).

2. At the time of his transfiguration.





"While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5).

C. Confessed by the demons.

"When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (Matthew 8:28-29).

II. He is the Son of Man.

A. He was born naturally.

"But after he had considered this, 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." (Matthew 1:20,21).

B. He was born supernaturally.

"The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the

power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

III. He is the Lamb of God.

"The next day John was there again with two of his disciples...When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:35-36).

A. As a Lamb of God, he died as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1John 2:2).

B. As a Lamb of God, he died in our place. His was a substitutionary death. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6,8).

C. Now no more sacrifice is needed. God says, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more" (Hebrews 10:17). The author of the Hebrews comments, "Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin" (V.18).





IV. He is the Saviour of the world.

"They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world." (John 4:42).

"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1John 4:14).

The Bible says, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

V. He is the only mediator between God and man.

"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1Timothy 2:5).

A. Job cried, "If only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together" (Job 9:33).

B. Job cried again, "If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling!" (Job 23:3).

The baby in the manger is the answer to his cries.

VI. He is the only way to God.

Our Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

VII. He is Lord of all.

"You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36).

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

VIII. He is the Judge of the living and the dead.

"For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:31).

"He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as





judge of the living and the dead." (Acts 10:42).

Conclusion:

The baby of the manger is no longer in the manger. He is the risen Saviour, exalted to the right hand of God in all power, authority and glory. He is the soon coming King.

How should we relate to him?

1. Worship him - wise men from the East worshipped him.

2. Love and adore him - We sing, "O come, all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem; Come and behold Him Born the King of angels; O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord." Let us do exactly that.

3. Present your 'gifts' to him - wise men from the East offered Gold, frankincense, myrrh fit for the King, the High Priest and the Sacrifice. We can give our heart to him.

4. Spread the word about him - Like the angels did- "Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

Like the shepherd did- "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child" (Luke 2:17).

5. Glorify God, like the shepherds did- "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told" (Luke 2:17,20).

© Rev. Richard Masih, New Delhi



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EVIDENCE OF HIS GOODNESS OVER YOUR LIFE

Ms. Stuti Farmer

With the New year on your threshold and the previous two years spent battling against the coronavirus pandemic, facing various kinds of hardships, and adjusting to this new normal phase, you my friend, need to take a moment, and see the evidence of God's goodness all over your life.

The New Year is going to set foot in with a new share of pop culture, a new share of trends, new memes, new apps, new schedules, new shows, new people, and a whole lot of new opportunities. You will be taking major decisions, changing some old habits, or making new year resolutions, you need to make sure that all these things are aligning with God's will. Here are

a few things which I am going to mention for you, and you can focus on them as you step into 2022.

- **Confess** your sins: This year during a camp while I was attending the session on Doctrine of sin, this is a sentence that cut through my heart; **sin is something that will always make us feel like we belong to it. We are not sinners because we sin, but because we are already sinners, so we sin.** Sin is something we naturally inherited from our forefathers and no matter how many good works we do, at the end of the day, you and I are still going to be a sinner. The punishment of sin, which is death, was taken





by Jesus Christ. Before I had accepted Jesus in my heart as Lord and saviour, I used to commit sins without any guilt, without my conscience ever pricking me, I never had peace because I did not use to ask forgiveness about it. But since the day I accepted Christ, I realized that **Repenting from our sins will always draw us closer to God and grant us peace.** Come before Him, pondering about everything you did this past year that was displeasing to Him, and **seek His forgiveness. He is waiting for you with open arms, don't wait!**

- **Great is his faithfulness:** Every day and every breath are a gift by God that should remind you of His faithfulness. Take time to sit with your friends or family to **thank the Lord for this past year.** Yes, you must have faced challenges in your studies or work, yes many of you must have lost your loved ones, yes you must have given in to temptation, yes you must have felt helpless and lonely, yes you must have been angry about some things and yes, we all have walked the road of

many unspoken struggles. But what I realized this past year was, no matter, whatever happens, you are never without hope when you have Jesus.

- **He is the God of the ages:** Hebrews 13:8, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. If you have decided to grow in the Lord this new year, you do not need any new approach. You need the same old approach, our God never changes, He is the God of all ages. The same God who parted the Red sea, who helped Joseph flee away from temptation, who helped Daniel take a stand and not defile himself, and who used fishermen like Peter and John to bring many into the light is the God who is with you. John 15 reminds us that Jesus is the true vine, God the Father is the gardener and you and I are the branches. **If you want to bear fruit, you have to remain in Jesus.** You need to be devoted to fellowship with godly people (Acts 2:42) and you need to spend more and more time in prayer as you step into this new year. Prayer is a great privilege you have,





bringing you in communion
with God.

There are many plans and resolutions which you must have taken but it is the Lord's will that prevails, and His will is perfect for you. Here are some beautiful lines from the song Evidence by Josh Baldwin;

**Help me remember when I'm
weak
Fear may come, but fear will
leave
You lead my heart to victory
You are my strength and You
always will be
I see the evidence of Your
goodness
All over my life, all over my
life**

**I see Your promises in
fulfilment
All over my life, all over my
life.**



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I belong to Dehradun. Completed B.Sc in Botany, Zoology and Geology. I am involved with the UESI ministry and love to sing and write.



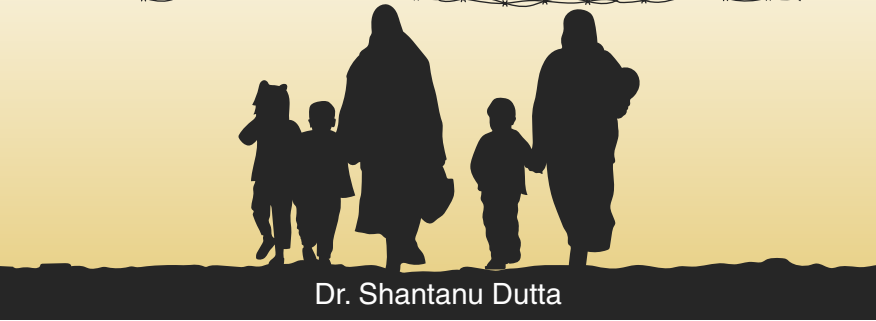
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given, and the government
will be on his shoulders. And he will be
called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

- Isaiah 9:6





Migrants, Aliens and the Other



18th December is observed globally as the international Migrants Day and it comes and goes every year, silent and invisible as the migrants themselves often are. However, in the last year or two, migrants have been in the news over the last year in particular, particularly as images of migrants walking for hundreds of miles to their villages past our homes flashed on our televisions and newspapers as India shut down in 2021 and their jobs ceased to exist literally overnight. The reverse migration that also happened as India unlocked later in the year, did not receive as much as it should have. But for a while, migrants emerged from their shadowy world into the limelight. Migrants

are literally everywhere around me, but literally invisible

My household help, the security guards at the society gate, the gardener who waters the plant, lady who irons all the clothes in the society - all are from a far-away village, an anonymous but necessary presence in all our lives. Their presence and importance ironically takes on a meaning when they are not there - at the turn of festivals like Holi or Diwali when the gardener disappears, a new and unfamiliar security guard appears - on enquiry one learns that they have gone to their Gaon - the ubiquitous village far away in a distant state, possibly one I have passed as I take the train to my





own Gaon in equally distant Kolkata. In that sense, we are all migrants, I myself am one, an alien who has made the place I live and work from as my own, though in reality I am not really one of the locals.

Migration for work within India is highly circular, with migrants working in multiple destinations during their lifetimes, and retiring in their native places. As per the Economic Survey of India 2016-17, there are over a hundred million migrant workers like me in India. Tens of millions migrate seasonally in India for work—for a few months of the year, drawn disproportionately from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and from particular clusters in central India (see map). They work in precarious worksites in sectors ranging from construction and brick kilns to rural harvesting operations. Of course, there are other kinds of migrations ongoing in contemporary India on a vast scale—for reasons such as marriage, education, job transfers, and involuntary displacements.

It is strange for me to see the

imagery of the people of God as migrants forever. Abraham, the father of our faith, migrated from the land of Ur to a land that was never his own though God promised that someday he would give it to his descendants. Generations later, Jacob and his sons and retinue migrated to Egypt as famine arose in the land they lived in and then again many generations later, reverse migrated back to Canan under the leadership of Moses and then Joshua, to forcibly evict and occupy people who by now had come to live and make the land their home. Just who gets to legitimately possess the land - the early settler or the latter one is still not settled as we all know. The concepts of migration in the Bible begin with the promise to Abraham, continue with the exodus experience and right down to the Babylonian exile which forced the Jews to reconsider their traditional faith and make it suitable for their life in the diaspora. The Christian church from its very beginnings took advantage of this achievement and considered itself as the "wandering people of God" (Hebrews 13,14).





The biblical witness is crystal clear when it comes to how Christians should feel and act towards migrants. There is a coherent vision of community wellbeing, and a consistent emphasis on justice, grace and neighbour-love toward all who are in need, summed up most profoundly in the biblical concept of shalom, "a picture of community, of life in relationships, in which things are as they are supposed to be where people live in harmony and delight with God, each other, and the world." The theme of exiles and pilgrims as the chosen of God, who must in turn welcome the stranger, is so strong a theme in biblical faith that it creates a presumption in favour of admitting the migrant, granting asylum to the refugee, and treating the alien as an equal.

Jesus himself is the ultimate migrant, coming from heaven to point the way back to God and God's ways (2 Corinthians 8:9;

Philippians 2:5-8). The infant Jesus and his family experienced life as refugees, forced to flee the wrath of King Herod, and finding sanctuary in Egypt until the threat had passed (Matthew 2:13-23; see also 8:20). He knew what it was like to be an outsider, and a refugee, and to face the challenges of assimilation or integration – and the pain of loss, and ostracism, and rejection.



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The earth is full of His unfailing love.

- Psalm 33: 5





THE DRAMATIS PERSONAE OF CHRISTMAS

Dr. Sanjay Avinash Mall



All stories have characters around whom the story revolves. In the Christmas story, we find that there are several groups of people who are an inseparable part of the story. Their backgrounds are very diverse but each of them has played a very important role in the story. They are as follows:

- The Angels
- The Shepherds
- The Magi
- The Chief Priests of Herod's court.
- King Herod

The Angels:

The angels were the first to announce the birth of the Saviour. They were the first to sing about the Glory of God in the Highest.

God did not settle for anything lesser than the heavenly choir to announce the birth of His only Begotten Son.

The Shepherds:

The shepherds mentioned in the story were one of the most marginalised communities at that time. In fact, their witness was not accepted in a court of law in those days. In the eyes of the contemporary society, they were marginalised, but not in the eyes of God in whose image they had been fearfully and wonderfully made. It was these people that God chose to be the first witnesses to the birth of His Son. They also took on the role of being the first messengers who carried the Good News of the





birth of Jesus in the surrounding areas.

The Magi:

The Magi were astrologers. In their study of the stars, they came to know of the birth of the Saviour and so travelled all the way from their country. They knew that the King of the Jews had been born and so, they rightfully went to the king's palace expecting to find Him there. They would have received a rude shock on finding that there was no celebration either in the palace or the city as no one knew anything about the Royal birth.

The Chief Priests of Herod:

The chief priests and teachers of the law in the court of Herod knew of the birth of Jesus but they had kept the prophecy to themselves for reasons known to them only. In fact, the information was forced out of them by Herod. If the wisemen had not reached Herod's palace, the information would not have come out of them.

We are not very different from them. We have celebrated the birth of Jesus every year but have not told our neighbours about Him. The birth of Christ is

celebrated in our homes but have we really experienced His birth in our hearts. In many ways, the celebration is only an external manifestation. Once the day is over, we leave the Christ child in the manger and remember Him the next year only.

King Herod:

In Herod, we find a king who had the following three characteristics, He was a disturbed king. He was a deceptive king and he was a desperate king. On hearing the news of the birth of the King of the Jews, he was extremely very disturbed. From being a disturbed king, he goes on to become a deceptive king. He suddenly tries to project himself as a religious person as he expresses the desire to go and worship Jesus. Finally, when he learnt that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he became the desperate king and went about murdering the children less than two years of age. Thus, the protector of the people became the murderer.

The angels proclaimed the birth in the heavens. The shepherds witnessed the Christ child in the





manger and spread the Good News in the surrounding countryside. The Magi had studied about Him in the stars and in their books and under took an arduous journey to have a personal encounter with Him. The people with the scripture missed the Messiah but those who followed the Star found Him. The Chief Priest of Herod's court had the scripture but they missed their close encounter with the Messiah. During this time of the pandemic, let us make the most of the time to tell the people of the birth of the Saviour who went to the cross so that our sins could be forgiven.

have succumbed to the virus and have died. We do not know what the future holds for us. In the midst of all the trouble, it is only Jesus who can give us peace and comfort which the world desperately needs at this time.

Wishing you a Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year



Dr. Sanjay Avinash Mall
works for World Vision India. He lives in Lucknow

The year that is soon coming to an end has been one of terrible uncertainties. Our loved ones



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





Yes, He Has Healed My Cancer!

Rev. Ashish Hirday

Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases (Psalms 103:2,3).

I count it as my joy and privilege to share my testimony of the healing that I have received lately. Of course, this journey was not easy. As human beings, we as a family went through anxiety, questions, fears and emotional instabilities. The sole purpose of this sharing is to encourage the readers to trust in the Lord and give glory to Him alone in whatever we may face in life.

In December 2020, I was diagnosed with diabetes. My lipid profile and liver functions were also not encouraging. The doctor

looked at my reports and took a deep breath and said the reports were concerning. He put me on diabetes and heart-related medicines for a month. I came back home with a broken heart and started weeping. I was not willing to accept the fact that at the age of 34, I had become a diabetic and heart patient. However, my wife and I started praying about the whole situation. To be honest, I was emotionally down and asked God what was His purpose in the whole thing. My question was answered through Scriptures. I understood that God wanted me to depend more on Him and His grace.

During those days, I did much research and reading on





reversing diabetes and heart issues. It certainly helped me to understand that these diseases can be reversed. I started doing exercise and following a good diet. Initially, I could run only 300 meters but eventually, I started jogging 5 km per day.

In two months, by looking at my fresh reports, the doctor was amazed and stopped my medicines. Because, by then, I was able to reverse diabetes and other medical issues. On 28th Feb 2021, my doctor said that I could lead my life without medicines. In five months, I was able to lose 20 kgs of weight. I was extremely happy and praising God for his healing. In the entire journey, God gave me the courage to take such bold steps. And of course, I was able to take these crazy steps because I knew God was in it.

After experiencing this amazing transformation, I started coaching youth, pastors and leaders on leading a healthy life. Everything was going so well in my life. I was under the impression that I was healthy, fit and fine.

At the end of August 2021, I started developing some anxiety. Even though I was doing well physically, in my heart I began to feel that something was wrong with me. These anxious thoughts led me to check my urine every day. Each day, my feelings became stronger that I was going to see something abnormal in my urine.

On the morning of the 8th of September, I got up, freshened up and went to my wife with some anxious feelings. Out of those feelings, I told her I wondered if I might have Cancer because I was feeling that something was wrong with me. She in her innocence asked me not to say it. After that we got busy in our daily activities.

On the same day, in the evening after my exercise, I went to the bathroom. There my anxiety and fears doubled up because that day I saw an abnormality in my urine, I found a blood clot. All my fears came true.

Immediately, I called my doctor friends from Pune and another one from Chennai. Both of them





suggested me to go for USG. The next day, I went to get the USG done. There, the doctor found an abnormal tumor in my right kidney. He advised me to go for a further checkup.

I came back home with much disappointment. I pulled out my reports and started reading them. In the diagnosis, the doctor had mentioned that probably it was Renal Cell Carcinoma (kidney cancer). When I read that, I became numb and started weeping bitterly. My wife, Rachana, was shattered. Our 8 years old son, Anugrah and 4 years old daughter, Aradhana also started crying. On that day, I sat in one place without having food and water for 3 to 4 hours, not knowing what to do.

On the health front, I was affected with a dreadful disease and financially, I was not in a position to even go for further investigations. That day in my account, I had only Rs. 2,500. I told my wife poverty would kill me. With strong faith, she said God would heal me. And that's where our deep faith journey began.

Our friend Dr. Anita, a CMC graduate, advised me to go to the Christian Medical College (CMC Vellore) for further investigations and treatment. Doctor Anita and Mrs. Monica Raj (CMS staff) made an appointment for me for the 10th of September. Rev. Vijayesh Lal made arrangements for me and my wife to travel to Vellore. On the 10th of September, I was introduced to Mrs. Magdalene and Miss. Bincy from CMC's mission department. They were with us like elder sisters throughout all the procedures. Tirelessly, they helped us.

On the same day, I met a committed Christian Dr. Rajadoss M., who I would call a Pastoral Doctor. I was very nervous and scared about the diagnosis. Out of anxiety, I asked him whether I would survive. He said "Ashish, we are vapor in the eyes of God, even I can't guarantee my life, let's trust the Lord and do what we can." I could see his love and compassion for his patients. He asked me to go through several tests and made it free for me. Things started falling





in place, as if God had already gone ahead of us and prepared a place for us over there.

In Vellore, we stayed at Missionary Upholders Trust, where we were always encouraged by Rev. John Daniel the head of the MUT. Every time he told me, "Ashish your sickness has a purpose and God will use it for his glory." The staff at MUT was so kind to go out of their way to help us. They often told me that they were praying fervently for me. After experiencing such a Christian love and care at CMC and MUT, I started calling my cancer journey a "spiritual retreat."

I met so many of God's servants at MUT and CMC whose stories were so amazing and filled with God's miracles. There were times I would get panic attacks. But my wife was always there to pray for me and extend her arm whenever I was down. Above all, our God was with us.

On the 13th of September, I had to wear a hospital gown for the first time to get the CT scan done. That day I felt till then that I was

fine and then I was a cancer patient. However, in the entire journey, God was granting me His peace and courage to face the realities.

On the 14th of September, I had the second appointment with the doctor. Before going to the doctor's, we went to the CMC chapel. We had been to this chapel in 2008 as theological students but this time, we were there as cancer patient and wife. There, we both wept before the Lord and asked for His healing. I prayed to God to give me one more chance to love Him, my wife and kids. As I opened my eyes, I saw the following verse on the screen "This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the Lord" (2 Kings 20:5). I felt as if the Lord gave this promise to me, and I started smiling. That moment, I got a divine peace and with that promise I went to see my doctor.

I had to wait almost seven hours, but after my long wait and my turn came, Dr. Rajadoss warmly





welcomed me. He informed me that all my reports were good except the CT scan. He confirmed that there was cancer in my right kidney. To treat it, the only option was to remove my entire right kidney. I was not ready for this.

I had lots of questions. My doctor was so compassionate and kind to clarify my concerns. He assured me that I could lead a healthy life with one kidney as I was a disciplined person. He told me the astounding fact that their data suggests people with one kidney are living longer than people with two kidneys. That was an encouraging fact for me. He asked me to get admitted on the next day and he scheduled my surgery for the 16th of September.

I asked the doctor whether I could get some concession for the treatment. He smiled at me and said, the urology department had decided to treat me freely. This was a sign of God's providence, goodness and grace. We were in tears before the doctor and praising God and thanking the department.

On the 15th of September, I got admitted, according to the Lord's promise (2 Kings 20:5) that was the first day. That night was very challenging for me. I could see some patients who were going through pain and agony. I was praying to God not to take me through such painful experience. Somehow, that night I slept with so many anxious thoughts.

On the morning of 16th of September, at 6:00 AM, the nurse came and asked me to get ready for the surgery. I went to the bathroom and cried over there so that my wife would not see me. Yes, I was scared. I was thinking "what if I die during the surgery?" With those thoughts, I came out. Again, I was in hospital gown and laying down on the stretcher. As my stretcher was pushed towards the operation theater, I was only able to see the ceiling of the hospital and I was only able to recall the one verse that says, His grace is sufficient for us.

Finally, we arrived at the entrance of the operation theater and after that point, I was all alone. My wife was not allowed to accompany me beyond that point. Till then,





she was holding my hand but there she had to let me go alone. That was the first time, I saw her breaking down in tears. To make her comfortable, I had to put up a fake smile on my face. But honestly, I was scared.

When I was taken into the operation theater, I strongly remember that I was literally shivering. I earnestly prayed to God to give me His peace. And, to my surprise, He gave me His peace. My fears had gone and I peacefully slept for almost 30 mins in the operations theater. After that, the anesthetist came and pushed my stretcher towards the surgery room. The team of doctors was amazing and very Godly. They gave me the anesthesia at 7:30 AM and I opened my eyes at around 11:30 AM. The anesthetist told me that the operation was successful.

During the surgery, my sugar, blood pressure and heart rates were perfectly normal. She even said that my body was in good condition and I needed to continue to exercise and lead a healthy life.

I was moved to the observation room and kept there the whole night. As per the Lord's promise, that was the second day of my healing journey.

On the morning of the 17th of September, the nurse came and asked me to go to the general ward. I asked for a wheelchair but she insisted that I walk. I was scared to walk because it was not even 24 hours after my surgery. But the Lord strengthened me. My wife gave me support and I walked to the general room.

I was told that after surgery, I would have to be in the hospital for two days. The Chaplain of the CMC visited me. There I kept talking about the goodness of God. The chaplain said that he was so encouraged by our testimony and faith in the Lord. In the afternoon, Dr. Rajadoss visited me. He said that he would discharge me on the 18th of September.

He left my room but soon came back again. That time he asked me, "Ashish, is it okay if we discharge you today?" I





immediately said yes." I was so happy that after undergoing a major surgery I was getting discharged within a day. We were able to experience the Lord's healing touch in my life.

As I was changing my hospital gown, I saw clips on my wounds. That terrified me and I started fainting. There was a very godly couple with us, Pastor Suresh D. and his lovely wife Mrs. Priti. (This couple was with us like angels. God sent them as His angels to stand with us and support us throughout out my treatment.) Pas. Suresh held me and made me sit on the wheelchair. Very gently he asked "Ashish, are you scared?" I said, "yes, I am."

On evening of the 17th of September, this couple took us to the MUT guest house. There is a chapel at MUT, I went walking near that chapel and thanked God for fulfilling His promise. According to the Lord's promise, that was the third. Through 2Kings 20:5, He had promised me that on third day I would walk to the temple, and He enabled me to do that. Our God is way maker,

miracle worker and promise keeper.

Post-surgery complications were there, but God helped me to endeavor it and He kept reminding me that His grace is sufficient for me.

On the 24th of September, I had an appointment with the doctor because my biopsy reports had come back. Again, my Godly doctor welcomed me with a warm smile. I was anxious about the spread of cancer in my body. But, the doctor had some good news for me. He told me that the cancer was in initial stage. He was happy to inform me that the cancer was localized and had not spread anywhere. After hearing this, both my wife I were in tears and started praising God and thanking the doctor. Our doctor told me not to thank him but to thank God. Finally, he said, "Ashish, now medically you are cancer free, you can go home and continue to serve the Lord."

This is how our God healed me and saved my life. This journey was not easy for my wife and me, but everyday God reminds us that





there is His purpose in my sickness, He would heal me and make my life a living testimony.

We experienced God in following ways. Firstly, as Jehovah Rapha the one who heals. He healed me from cancer. Secondly, Jehovah Shalom, the one who gives us peace. We were anxious about the future, but God provided His incomparable peace in every situation that we were facing. He made us bold and gave the assurance that He is with us. Thirdly, as Jehovah Jireh, the one who provides everything that we need. As mentioned, I had only Rs. 2,500 for my treatment but as we took a faith step to go to CMC, God in His sovereignty fulfilled all our needs in a miraculous way. My entire treatment was made free by the doctors. God was not only working in our lives, but He also prepared the doctors' hearts to give us the full concession. Finally, Jehovah Rohi, the Lord is my Shepherd. From the beginning, the Lord was leading us like a good shepherd and we, as a family, strongly believe that He'll lead us in the future too.

During those days, I made a

commitment with the Lord that if He gave me a second chance to live, I would get involved in preaching and counselling the hurting people. I request you to continue to pray for me and my family so that we will be able to fulfill our call and renewed commitments.



Rev. Ashish Hirday

Serves at Evangelical Fellowship of India as National Director for Youth Commission. He is also serving at Asia Evangelical Alliance Youth Commission as the Executive Director. He holds post graduate degree in Missiology and Family Life Education. He is married to Rachana and has two lovely kids Anugrah & Aradhana.

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Arise! Christian Journalists!

Mrs. E. Faith Kulothungan



Word is a powerful tool. And God's word is immensely powerful. In Habakkuk 2:2 we read, "Then the Lord replied: Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it." In Jeremiah 30:2 we read, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you". Write, write write!!! Our Lord says write. Imagine, if the prophets and the authors of the books of the Bible had not documented what God spoke, we would not have had a manual for life!

Those who were in communication with God heard the voice of the Lord. They have written down as inspired by God, every word. The authors were

prompted by the Holy Spirit to write accurately as it took place. God used human writers to be His voice though God is the source of every word in the Bible. Well, now it's quite apparent why God's people are called to write, to document when God speaks to us. Writing that is inspired by God, commands honesty and integrity. In journalism, the writer's lifestyle and testimony is the key. The Bible is the best example to model a way for writing skills. Life experiences, transformed life stories, relevant parables, rich language, cultural and historical references, accurate numerical, statistical, survey, and much more to add up are seen in this wonder book! The journalists can grab all that they look for from this book of life.





It's not just the gift of writing that matters; it's the prompting of the Holy Spirit that matters. We who know the truth have the words of life flowing as we base our writing on the strong belief. Our faith makes us a better, more determined journalist.

"The purpose of journalism is thus to provide citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their governments". Right decisions and right choices are pivotal for every life to rotate amidst the cares of the world smoothly. How much more the Christ centered journalism can empower the informed in making the right

decisions about lives, our communities, our societies and our government? It is the need of the hour.



Mrs. E. Faith Kulothungan
is serving with Maharashtra Village Ministries for the past 29 years, presently the Associate General Secretary of MVM, Nagpur. She is involved in Women's Leadership, Educating Rural Children and in Counselling.



"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to
those on whom his favor rests."

- Luke 2:14





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Intercessory Prayer Points



December 2021

1 WEDNESDAY Thank God for His guidance and provision throughout the year 2021. As we come to the last month of the year, celebrate His divine love that strengthened and enabled you despite many challenges.

2 THURSDAY Pray for the Christian Education department of EFI. Pray that the CEEFI materials would effectively minister to children and help them grow in maturity of their faith.

3 FRIDAY Pray for Bharat Susamachar Samiti, Dehradun. During the last 30 years, BSS has been serving the community very effectively. Continue to pray that many lives may be transformed through this ministry.

4 SATURDAY Pray that you may spread kindness, patience and love this Christmas season so that people around you may see God who revealed Himself through His Son Jesus Christ.

5 SUNDAY Pray for your pastor(s)

as they start teaching on the miraculous birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal God who became man to save us from the power of sin and death.

6 MONDAY Pray for Christian Institute of Management at Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Pray that they may train and equip Churches and organisations in India to achieve management excellence to fulfil their God given Vision and Mission.

7 TUESDAY Pray for ministry of Salvation Army, India. Salvation Army was founded with a deep desire to fight against poverty and social injustice. Pray that they may continue to do their good works that would bring glory to God and goodness to mankind.

8 WEDNESDAY Pray that the world would be a better place to live because you and I pledge to continue showing kindness to people around us. Continue to pray that kindness and love would replace evil in our society and communities.





9 THURSDAY Pray for your city today. Pray that the Holy Spirit would move mightily and bring God's kingdom in people's heart as believers start preparing the celebration of Christ's birth.

10 FRIDAY Pray for Caleb Mission, Odisha. Pray for their ministry to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Pray that they would be effective tools in the hands of God for the extension of His kingdom.

11 SATURDAY Pray for those who have lost their loved ones during this year. Our heart goes out to them. Pray for God's comfort and peace to fill their hearts. May the Lord wipe away their tears and pour in hope, peace and joy because He lives.

12 SUNDAY Pray for yourself that the joy of Christmas may fill your heart and that you may renew your commitment to God who sent His Son to save you from sin and eternal death.

13 MONDAY Pray for Acts India Missionary Ministries, Tamil Nadu. Pray that the ministry would spread the love of Christ to those who have not yet known Christ and His sacrificial work on the cross. May God continue to equip them and use them.

14 TUESDAY Pray for the children as they pursue education during this uncertain time. Pray that they would focus and pursue

wholeheartedly. Pray for protection and many blessings both physically and spiritually.

15 WEDNESDAY Pray for your neighborhood today. Pray that God may open the way for you to share about Jesus the Messiah. Pray for hearts and minds to be ready to receive Him as their Saviour and king.

16 THURSDAY Pray for growth of our country in all aspects. Pray that the people would have high values and care for fellow citizens. Pray for peace and prosperity.

17 FRIDAY Pray for Little Flock Fellowship, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Pray that the church may impact the lives of many people especially during this Christmas season.

18 SATURDAY Pray for the preparation for Christmas in different parts of the world. Pray that Jesus, Son of God, second person of Trinity would be lifted high up and worshipped. Pray for many lives to be saved and renewed this season.

19 SUNDAY Pray for comfort for the families who have lost their loved ones. As Christmas approach, pray that the Holy Spirit would shift their focus on Jesus, God's precious gift to mankind. Pray for joy and peace for them.

20 MONDAY Pray for "Dream India Transformation". Pray that this non-profit Charitable organization which





started with a vision to see India rise above poverty, illiteracy, injustice, revenge, envy and hatred in the name of cast, color and creed will accomplish its goal and purpose.

21 TUESDAY Thank God for sending His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ to save the world from sin and death. Pray that hearts may be softened and be ready to receive the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

22 WEDNESDAY Pray God would lift up our spirits and enable us to shift our focus on Him rather than our present circumstances and lose heart.

23 THURSDAY Pray for protection of believers as they prepare and celebrate the birth of Christ. Pray that those who want to disturb would rather meet the baby King born in a humble manger.

24 FRIDAY Continue to pray for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be preached and received by people despite opposition. Pray that the name of Jesus Christ will be lifted high in our country.

25 SATURDAY Pray that you and your family would have a blessed Christmas. Thank God for the absolute obedience of Christ who became human to dwell with us and save us. Pray also that many hearts would turn to Him for salvation this year.

26 SUNDAY Pray for all the elders of the Church and thank God for their lives and pray that they will be able to build the church according to the biblical standards and build the younger generation in the love of the Lord.

27 MONDAY Pray that you may worship God with all your heart, soul, mind and body. Pray that nothing would hinder your worship of Him. Praise Him for who He is and thank Him for what he has done for you and your family

28 TUESDAY Thank God for all the missionaries / evangelists working in the field. Thank God for their lives and pray that God will bless them and their families as they continue to live His word.

29 WEDNESDAY Pray that this holiday season is a time of rest and restoration for Gospel workers and their families. Pray for God's Spirit to encourage them and equip them for the coming years and assignments.

30 THURSDAY Pray for the ministry of Evangelical Fellowship of India. Pray that God would give new vision and new direction for ministry for the coming years.

31 FRIDAY Commit yourself unto the Lord. Thank Him for the extended life that you enjoyed. Pray that you would love Him more than ever. Pray for blessed year ahead.



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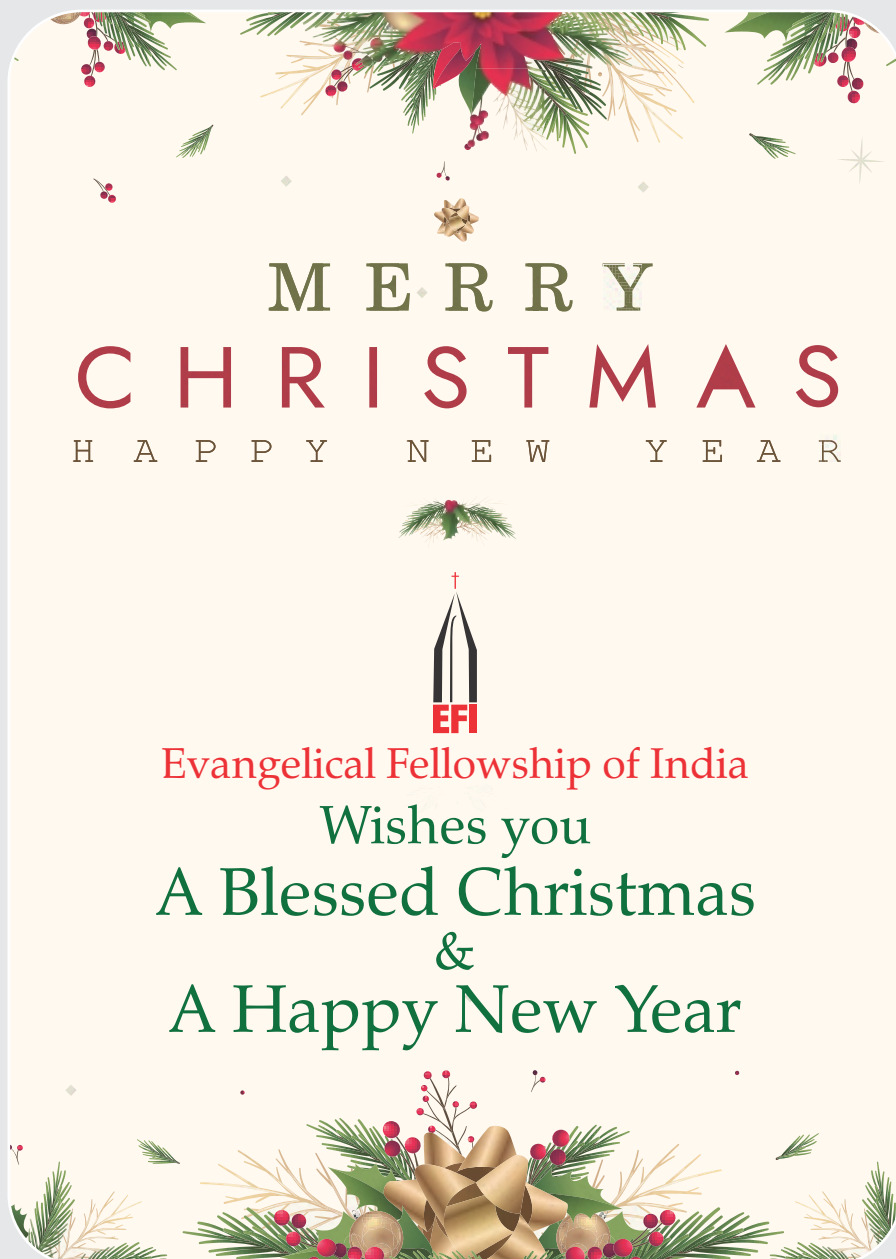
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