

aim

*But when the fullness
of the time came,
God sent His Son,
born of a woman,
born under the Law,
so that He might redeem
those who were under
the Law, that we might
receive the adoption as
sons and daughters.*

Galatians 4:4-5





Evangelical Fellowship of India

Wishes you

Merry
Christmas

AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

A Journey of Faith

contents

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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)

The joy of an approaching Christmas this year is tinged in sadness as we learn of the home calling of some beloved Indian Evangelical leaders. The former General Secretary of EFI and Asia Evangelical Alliance, Rev. Dr. Francis Sunderaraj; the pioneer cross-cultural missionary to Jammu and Kashmir and the founder of Kashmir Evangelical Fellowship and Himalayan Evangelical Mission, Dr. P M Thomas; and Pastor Walter Massey, who made national and international

headlines when he exemplified steadfastness and grace in the face of violent persecution.

We thank God for these leaders. He used them in different capacities to bless thousands of people in the nation of India and beyond. Their faithful obedience to God and His call on their lives is inspiring and would continue to encourage many in their own walk with God.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the writer tells to remember our leaders, take inspiration from their lives, and imitate their faith. We are exhorted to not only to think of our leaders but also to imitate their faith. Leadership comes from God and so we will

do well to honour them and their roles.

Our faith, lives and priorities can be built up by following good Christian leaders. The converse is also true. There are many people that you may know who have formed a bad opinion of the Christian faith by the way some leaders have behaved.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews follows this verse with this reminder in verse 8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” This gives us an assurance that it is God that ultimately matters because He works through people that He chooses.

All the great leaders of the Bible, who achieved impossible things, were able to do that because God worked through them. And while they fulfilled God’s purposes in their lifetime and passed away, the Lord that they served and spoke about, remains, and is the same.

If He could work through faithful leaders in the past, he can work

through us, if we are faithful and obedient. Just as God led them, He can lead us, if we let Him. When we see leaders who imitate Christ, it would be worthy to imitate them as they imitate the Lord Jesus.

The following quote is attributed to John Owen and is very helpful in this context: “We are not to follow mere men, not even the best of men, as our model and example in all things is Christ alone. But we can learn to emulate Christian graces where we see them displayed in Christian leaders.”

We are grateful to our Heavenly Father for Rev. Dr. Francis Sunderaraj, for Dr. P M Thomas and for Pastor Walter Massey. May their lives, faithful walk with God and their example continue to inspire us.

Forceful Conversions and Christmas

There is a petition filed in the Supreme Court by one Mr. Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay seeking direction to the Centre and the States to take strict steps

to control what he calls “Fraudulent Religious Conversions by intimidation, threatening, deceiving & luring through gifts and monetary benefits”.

The Supreme Court bench hearing the matter termed forced religious conversions as “dangerous”, and affecting the security of the nation, as it asked the Government to make their stand clear. The government immediately filed an affidavit stating that it is “cognizant of the gravity and the seriousness” of the issue of forced religious conversions. Solicitor General of India Tushar Mehta stated, “It’s a menace.”.

At the writing of this editorial, the Supreme Court has directed the Union Government to get information from all the States regarding the steps taken by them on the issue of forcible conversions. Civil society has commented on the court linking such conversions with issues of national security.

It important to note that there

seems to be hardly any data in the PIL filed by Mr. Upadhyay. He was not able to give any details when quizzed by Srinivasan Jain of NDTV. Instead, he chose to walk away on live television.

The Church in India has always been firm on its stance on forced conversions or conversions by allurement. It condemns them because conversion truly is a matter of heart and the transformation of the person. Forced conversion is no conversion.

The terms that are used here, and in many “freedom of religion” laws passed by various states, e.g., forced, allurement, fraud, need elaboration and the right context for they can easily be misconstrued, and the laws misused to target innocent people. There is evidence that this is indeed happening.

But the matter needs to be addressed for what it is. “Forcible and fraudulent conversions” has become a convenient bogey to be used against the Christian community and to spread

disinformation and create public opinion against them.

This debate, especially as Christmas draws near, is worrying. The Evangelical Fellowship of India has documented instances of targeting of Christian community for many years now and there has been a noticeable trend that the Christmas season is often marked by increased attack against Christians and the disruption of Christmas celebrations, all in the name of stopping alleged 'forcible conversions.'

In some places, the media especially the vernacular, while reporting the attack on Christians, and the so-called conspiracy of 'conversion', does not even call it forcible, but just uses the word 'conversion' as if that was a crime.

The bogey gets a new life, is deployed, and the cadre in the field is given a free hand to threaten, attack, intimidate and

file cases against Christians who must then prove their innocence through a prolonged struggle in courts. This becomes a punishment as the years go by.

This is the play book, the tool kit if you can term it that way. In the short term, it may yield political dividends or other rewards for the masterminds, but in the long term, it normalizes hatred, brings polarization, and pits citizens against each other thus harming the social fabric of the nation, and weakening it.

However, as Christians we are hopeful, not only that we would have peaceful Christmas celebrations, but that our nation would be healed, that divides would be bridged, that hatred would be conquered by love, and that the Prince of peace will shine His light on a nation that sorely needs it.

Merry Christmas! And may God bless us all.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal

God Sent Forth His Son

Rev. Dr. David Mende

Introduction

I came across this illustration some time ago. The story is told of an English nobleman who worked for many years as a railway porter, unaware of his true identity. One day a gentleman entered the railway station, made some inquiries, and asked the porter his name. Upon hearing it, the visitor said, "I have come to tell you that you are an Earl and entitled to a large estate." "Do you think that man continued to behave as a railway porter? Certainly not. He rushed from the station to take possession of his inheritance! We as Christians should do the same."¹

Some Christians don't know the rich inheritance they have in Christ. Some of them are still slaves to sin. They still live defeated lives. That's because they are still living in ignorance.

They celebrate Christmas without understanding the significance of what Christ accomplished through his incarnation, death, and resurrection. They miss out on the rich spiritual blessings as they are lost in the earthly celebrations. Galatians 4:4-7 reveals the awesome spiritual inheritance we have in Christ. Based on this text, I have entitled this article, 'God Sent Forth His Son.'

1. https://www.preceptaustin.org/galatians_devotionals

Paul writes this letter to a group of churches in Galatia (1:2), which is a region in present-day Turkey. Some Judaizers were teaching that Christians need to be circumcised and follow the law in order to be accepted by God. Paul counters such teaching and says that we are justified by faith alone. In Galatians 3:19-4:7, Paul says that the law was never intended to be in force perpetually. Since the promised Messiah had come, the purpose of the law is completed and those who believe in him are adopted as God's sons and become heirs. In Galatians 4:4-7, Paul writes that God sent his Son to redeem those who are under the law so that we can be adopted into God's family.

Galatians 4:4-7 presents two profound truths which are relevant even today.

1. God Sent His Son to Redeem Us (Gal. 4:4-5a).

In 3:29, Paul says, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." Then, in 4:1-2, Paul writes that all heirs are like slaves until a certain time. A boy might

be the owner of a huge property, but he can't take any legal decision. In those days, a boy was put under "guardians and manager" (v. 2). Someone else makes decisions for him. In that sense, he is like a slave, not having much freedom. But once the boy grows up to be a man, he receives his full inheritance. Similarly, my daughter, Karis has a bank account in her name, but she is not even aware of that. She can't sign on any of the cheques. She can't go to a bank and draw money. She can't operate internet banking too. As her father, I operate her account.

In verse 3, we see that "when we were children, we were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world." The Greek word for "elementary principles" is *stoicheion*. William Barclay informs that "A *stoicheion* was originally a line of things; for instance, it can mean a file of soldiers. But it came to mean the ABC, and then any elementary knowledge."² Both the Jews and Gentiles were under the "elementary principles of the world." This probably refers to the elementary stages of religious

2. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/galatians-4.html>

practice, whether in the Jewish or pagan religion. We were in the same situation “when we were children” (v. 3), that is, before we received Christ. Before the Jews could become heirs of Abraham's promise, something had to happen. God didn't leave Jews and Gentiles in slavery. What did he do?

In Galatians 4:4, apostle Paul writes, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.” Here, the word “but” is important. We were lost. We were without hope and God (Eph. 2:12). But praise God, he intervened in history! Just as a child is “under guardians and managers until the date set” (Gal. 4:2), the law was the guardian for the Jews until the time set by God. God sent his Son in due time. God sent his Son when the time “set” (v. 2) by him for his children to become adult sons and heirs came.

God works out things providentially at the right time. God sent his Son to this world at the right time. During this time, much of the world experienced “Pax Romana” (Roman Peace). There were good roads

throughout the Roman Empire. Roman soldiers were stationed to guard these roads. As a result, travel and commerce flourished. Greek unified the people who belonged to different regions. Also, there was such terrible moral deterioration that even the pagans criticized it. Many people were disillusioned with pagan gods. They were spiritually thirsty. Also, the law of Moses had completed its work of preparing people for Christ. People were looking for true spiritual freedom. So, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.” God always works on time. He is never early or late. We must trust God's timing. As 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise.”

Jesus is divine as he is God's “Son.” He is also human since he was “born of woman.” The eternal Son of God added humanity to his deity. The phrase “born of a man,” may be an allusion to the virgin birth of Christ. Since Jesus was “born of woman, born under the law,” he shared the condition of those who would he redeem. Jesus was subject to Jewish law. And he perfectly kept the law. Jesus puts the chains on himself

and takes them off the others.

By taking the law's curse on himself (3:10, 13) and dying on the cross (1:4), Jesus set the believers free from the condemnation of the law (v. 5a). Christ came to redeem the Jews who were slaves to the law and the Gentiles who were slaves to "the elementary principles of the world" (v. 3). The Gentiles were slaves to pagan religions and beliefs. Jews were in a sense slaves to the law for some time. The law can only condemn sin. So, it became an enslaving force. In that sense, the law is considered as "elementary principles of the world" (v. 3). Though God gave the Mosaic law, it was not the final word. It was only elementary teaching.

If a young child joins LKG, they learn basic and important things. But if they remain in LKG throughout their lives, that's tragic. So, both Gentiles, as well as Jews, are in some form of slavery. Before we got saved, even we were slaves to sin (Rom. 6:20) and received the wages of sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23). We couldn't get out of this slavery on our own. But praise

God, Jesus came to redeem us from the slavery of sin!

2. Since Christ Redeemed Us, We Are Adopted as God's Sons and Made Heirs (Gal. 4:5b-7).

Being freed from sin and condemnation of the law itself is amazing. But God didn't stop there. He adopted us as sons (v. 5b)! In a way, all humans are God's offspring (Acts 17:28-29). However, everyone doesn't have an intimate relationship with God as they are not saved. That's why some are referred to as the children of the devil (Jn 8:44). Even in the OT, Yahweh adopted Israel as his son (Exod. 4:22) and gave them the land of Canaan as an inheritance (cf. Deut. 26:1).

Some Romans adopted a son (usually, a grown-up man) to make him the heir of the family wealth. Generally, they adopted sons to have an heir. Some people go out of their way and help others. But they don't make others a part of their family. But that's what the Lord has done for us. Christ came to this earth and died on the cross so that we can be adopted as God's sons. The

Greek verbs translated “sent forth” (v. 4) and “has sent” (v. 6) are the same word (*exapostello*). So, God sent the Son as well as the Spirit.

Since the followers of Christ are now “sons” and thus grown-up, the Spirit is given to us as part of our rich inheritance. The Spirit helps us to experience the reality of being God's children. As Paul wrote to the Romans, “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). “Abba” is the Aramaic word for “father” (cf. Rom. 8:14-17). It's an intimate term for one's father. The slaves were not allowed to address the head of the family by this name. Earlier, even Jesus addressed the Father as “Abba” (Mk 14:36). The Jews referred to God as the father, but they rarely addressed God as such. And notice that we don't hesitatingly whisper, “Abba.” We cry, “Abba.” The Greek word for “crying” is a vivid verb that expresses deep emotion. This same verb is used in Matthew 27:50 as Jesus “cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.”

Now, we are given the great privilege of calling God as our “Abba” through the enablement of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 8:15-16). God assures us that we are his children through his Spirit. We have access to the same intimacy that Christ had with the Father! When we approach God in prayer, we can cry out to him “Abba!”

Galatians 4:7: So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Earlier, we were slaves.

But we were set free and now we are sons.

And since we are sons, we are heirs (cf. 3:14, 29).

God's children inherit all of his promises through his Son (cf. 3:26–27; Eph 1:3).

Jesus is by nature, God's unique Son.

But we are adopted as God's sons “through God.”

Salvation is God's doing. We do not and cannot contribute anything to it.

It is God who took the initiative to send his Son to this earth to die for our sins, set us free, adopted us as his sons, sent his Spirit into

our hearts, and made us heirs of his rich inheritance!

Conclusion

The reason Paul writes all this is to exhort the Galatians not to go back to their old slavery of trying to attain righteousness through the law.

It is possible to turn back to your old life. The Galatians had done that.

The big idea of this article is: Stand firm in the freedom you have as God's child.

The Christians in Galatia went back into the slavery of the law.

Today, some Christians go back into the slavery of sin.

Since you are God's child, you don't have to be a slave to sin anymore.

We must remember who we are and what we have in Christ.

Spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, fasting, and fellowship help us to remember who we are in Christ. Stand firm in the freedom you have as God's child.



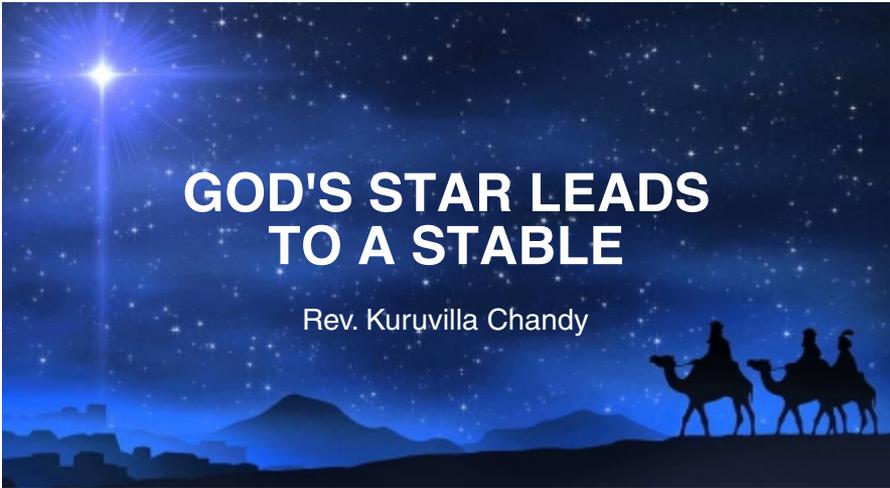
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Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

2 Corinthians 9:15 (NKJV)



GOD'S STAR LEADS TO A STABLE

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy

From time to time the Bethlehem star gets into the news. Some years ago, American astronomers declared that the Bethlehem star was not a star, but a double eclipse of Jupiter. Maybe. However, the theory that the Bethlehem star was not a star does not create any problems for faith, because the Bible only describes the phenomenon as the ancients perceived it. The Word of God is not written in modern or scientific language.

What the wise men claimed was that they had seen a new sign in the night sky which they said signified the birth of the king of the Jews. **Read the story in the Bible (Matthew 2:1-12).** They were no astronomers, but

astrologers. They believed that the fortunes and fates of humans were controlled by the stars. They did not know any better. But it is amazing how moderns scan and study “what the stars foretell” columns in newspapers and popular magazines.

The Bible is against all divination practices. God told His people that they must not “imitate the detestable ways of the nations ... practise divination...interpret omens.” He said, “Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD” and that they would be driven out of the Promised Land (Deut. 18:9-13). Later on, He said, “When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who

whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God?" The Lord urged His people to turn back to the Word. He said that if they do not turn back to the scriptures, they will have no light to guide them (Isa. 8:19-20). The Word says quite clearly and categorically that when God's people look to the stars, they are out of touch with God.

God Broke Through

But God being God, communicated with those ancient wise men even through their idolatrous practices. Idolatry is no barrier to God when He reaches out to humans. It is a barrier only to humans seeking God. The Lord broke through their idolatry to communicate to those men. The magi, when they looked to the stars, were just like everyone else. They looked for a palace, possessions and power, as signs of the kingdom. This is what everyone is looking for. Even those who are sophisticated enough to know that there is no truth in astrology are no different when it comes to what they want in life. Who looks for poverty and weakness? Who thinks that such qualities are

admirable or worthy of a quest? Everyone looks for good fortune.

When the magi came to the palace, they stopped looking to God for guidance. They imagined that they had reached their destination and did not want to go any further on their journey. We are just like them. We come to a place of good circumstances and wish that we could settle down and live happily ever after. But, as one songwriter put it,

This world is not my home
I'm just a-passing through;
My treasures are all laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue...

This is the attitude of a pilgrim. Such a person journeys through life with a destination in mind.

Abraham was such a pilgrim. He did not follow a star. He followed God's instructions. He remained a nomad all his life. He was a stranger and an alien in every place he went. He never came to a place where he felt he could settle down. No land on earth is satisfying to a person who views himself or herself as a pilgrim in life. He is always looking for a

better country because his citizenship is in heaven (Hebrews 11:6-10,13-16).

The Stables of Life

The star led the magi to a stable. It was the stable where Christ was born. The kings in our Christmas pageants kneel very easily in make-believe mangers. They wear silk saris, the hems of which their mothers lift as they walk the city's streets to prevent them becoming soiled and frayed. Like the magi, we discover that the stars we follow lead not to palaces, but to the stables of our lives. We expect and hope to find good fortune but find that life is tough. Some of us had dreams of wonderful careers but are now bored by the drudgery. Some were starry-eyed lovers, but now feel trapped in their marriages. How many unfulfilled dreams there are among people today! So many started out following a star and find themselves in the stables of life.

The magi initially mistook the palace for their destination; but when God corrected their steps, they found that God had led them to a stable. How do you think they

felt when they realised that God's star had led them to a stable? How will you feel and react when the star you follow leads you to a stable?

God's Choice

What we need to realise is that the stables of our lives are God's choice for us. He is the one who has led us to stables. That is life. It is life as He ordained. There are joys and sorrows, triumphs and defeats, highs and lows. We are blessed, but we also experience the curse of the 'Fall'. Yes, that is life after Eden and before Heaven. Like Job, we need to respond, "Shall we receive good from God and not trouble" (Job 2:10). When something is from God, have we learned to accept it for no other reason than that it is from God? The important thing is to recognise God's hand. We should neither be dazzled by the glamour of our situation, nor be depressed by the gloominess.

The magi were overjoyed when the star led them to the Child. They had set out to worship Him. If they had found Him in a palace, they would no doubt have worshipped Him. But the fact that

they found Him in a stable did not change their attitude toward the King. They still worshipped Him. If we worship God only when our circumstances are good, it is not God that we worship, but our circumstances. We have lost sight of God and react only to our situations.

God in the Stable

The magi came to a stable and found God in the middle of it. The message of Christmas is that God has entered the stables of our lives. He is Emmanuel, God with us. He is not a domineering God over us, or a compelling God before us, or an irresistible God invading us. He is God with us. He gets into the poverty, the muck and the grime of our lives.

When God is in the stables of our lives, we will not find satisfaction in the palaces of the world. We will find happiness only in the stable of His presence. Herod had his palace, but what an unhappy man he was! He ranted and raved, and in his rage, hit out and killed innocents. He was in a palace surrounded by all his guards, but he was a frightened man threatened by a mere baby.

There is nothing in a palace to make you happy, and there is nothing in a stable that can make you sad. If God is in a situation, He makes all the difference. And that is the message: God is in, because He wanted to be in. He could have chosen a palace, but He chose the stable. God stays in stables like us. He does not escape from stables. He enters the stable to touch it and make a difference. If God is not in the palace, it is not the place to be in. But if God is in a stable, it is the only place to be in.

Costly Gifts

The magi worshipped Christ in the stable. They offered their costly gifts to Him. They did not say, "Oh, it's only a baby, and a baby needs only a rattle...a carpenter's son needs only a wooden toy...if we give Him gold in a stable, we create problems of safety...If we give Him gold, frankincense and myrrh, we spoil His simplicity." That is how we talk. We argue that we should not give more than others to porters at train stations, domestic servants and others who form the unorganised labour force of our cities. If we do, we spoil them. Rather, we spoil it for ourselves,

and others of our crowd, because then those who do not belong to our class will begin to believe that they have a right to better working conditions.

If the Lord is the Lord, we must give Him the best. In the Old Testament, God asked His people to give Him the first fruits and the fatlings. He was to have priority and choice. He was not to be offered anything that was deformed or defective. Applying that to our times would mean that we are not to give Him the torn currency note that will not pass in the marketplace. We are not to give Him the leftovers of our self-indulgence and extravagance.

The magi did not say, “We’re going to see a king so let’s get some grand new clothes for ourselves.” Christmas and Easter are celebrated today by getting new clothes, feasting and indulging ourselves. Instead, the magi were lavish in the gifts they gave Jesus.

If the Lord is the Lord, we can never give Him too much. Because the Lord is the Lord, you can never give more than He has

given. We need to be lavish in giving to God. Because He was lavish first. Because He is more lavish, we will never out-give Him. Even when we give, we receive. In one sense, we can never give Him anything because He does not need anything. But we give, because we need to give and because there is blessing in giving.

Another Way

Finally, the magi went back another way. Their lives took a new direction. They did not go back to the palace. The old king with his riches did not matter anymore. Gone was the temptation to hobnob with the rich and powerful, which was what had misled them in the first place. From then on, they saw the old king as a mere man, and more than that, as a man opposed to God.

Jesus was in the world, and though the world was made by Him, it did not recognise Him. He came unto His own, and they would not receive Him. If that is the way the world treats my Lord, what do I have in common with that world? John said to the Church, “Never give your hearts

to this world or to any of the things in it. A man cannot love the Father and love the world at the same time. For the whole world-system based as it is on men's primitive desires, their greedy ambitions and the glamour of all that they think splendid, is not derived from the Father at all, but from the world itself. The world and its passionate desires will one day disappear. But the man who is following God's will is part of the permanent and cannot die" (1 John 2:15-17, Phillips). James put it more bluntly: "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4).

No longer must the Christian bow and grovel before the power mongers of this world, hanker after their approval or keep their company. Paul wrote to the Church in his day: "Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of 'the brightest and the best' among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately

chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these 'nobodies' to expose the hollow pretensions of the 'somebodies'?" (1 Corinthians 1:26-28, TM).

When you meet God in the stable, the palace no longer impresses you. You are not drawn to it. You avoid it. You find a new direction for your life. You want to fulfil God's will for your life. Once you encounter God in the stables, you do not want to retrace your steps to the palaces of the world. Once you encounter God, life takes a new direction.

So, open your eyes to catch the heavenly vision that will help you to live in the stables of this life because you find Jesus there.



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This Time of Christmas

Dr. Shantanu Dutta

Christmas time is a time to give and receive gifts, eating and drinking, seeing friends, family, loved ones. The atmosphere of goodwill and cheer. What's not to like? Quite a lot, actually. Christmas is often a source of great stress for many. Obviously, many people have good reason to not like Christmas, be it estrangement or loss of their own family or friends, trauma experienced during the festive period (with all the context cues constantly bringing the unpleasant memories flooding back) and so on. But, if we look at the modern manifestation of Christmas, it turns out there are a surprising number of elements that can, and probably do, lead to

an increase in stress, rather than the opposite.

Christmas brings with it a particular set of environmental features that could easily combine to tick us off, even if we don't realise it. For instance, Christmas (in the northern hemisphere) happens in winter, when the days are shorter, and the weather is generally poor. There's a wealth of data to suggest that reduced daylight has a negative effect on our mood, so that's already an issue. The traditional image of Christmas is incredibly optimistic. Nearly every portrayal shows a cosy, cheerful, tastefully decorated home in which a happy

family gathers to share a large dinner cooked to picture-postcard perfection.

Sadly, life is just too complex and messy to ever guarantee the mainstream portrayal of a perfect Christmas. And yet, we still expect it. The human tendency to expect the best is the result of a well-known optimism bias, something seemingly inherent in our brains.

What should be the greatest season of the year, which should bring us joy and warm our hearts, instead often brings stress and heartburn, headaches, and depression. The stress associated with the Christmas holidays often makes what should be the most wonderful season of the year, a miserable mess. The stress that plagues people at this time of the year is rooted in three basic sources; Time (getting everything done), Money (paying for it) and Emotions (conflict with family and past painful memories that resurface).

Unfortunately, even us who focus on the incarnation of Jesus

during this time of year, can get caught up in the stress that is created by the worldly expectations of the season. So, we tend to eat too much and spend too much and then, we have to live with the consequences for quite some time, which creates even more stress in our lives. But, as we would expect, we find an antidote to that self-induced stress in the Bible.

Does Christ have anything to say to us in the midst of this season of hurry and rush? I believe he does. After all, it's his birthday that we celebrate at Christmas, so what does he think about all of this? If you stop to think about it, stress is nothing new at Christmas. The events surrounding the very first Christmas were filled with almost unimaginable stress.

Angels start showing up, scaring the living daylights out of people. Mary is pregnant out of wedlock. Joseph, Mary's husband to be, wants to quietly break-off the marriage. Joseph is told that Mary is carrying the Son of God and it is up to him to care for them. Joseph, along with every other

head of a household, is compelled by law to return to the city of his birth for the census. Joseph finds himself on the road with a pregnant woman; no rest stops, no restaurants, no comforts. I doubt very seriously that Mary was in a very good mood by the time they arrived in Bethlehem. When they finally arrive at Bethlehem Joseph discovers there are no vacancies, and he is going to have to tell his pregnant wife that they are going to stay in a barn. There was a lot of stress associated with the first Christmas!

In Luke 10:38-42, we find the familiar story of Jesus visiting Mary and Martha's home. Poor Martha understood what stress was, rushing around trying to get everything ready – after all Jesus was in her house. Martha surely represents every person who is so worked up about getting everything done that needs to be done so that they can “enjoy Christmas.” One translation of verse forty reads, “Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.” That sure sounds like our lives sometimes. Like Martha we can get so

distracted by what we consider the many necessary things that we miss the point. By focusing on those things of lesser importance, we miss what is the most important.

The thing about Martha's predicament is that no one had assigned her all these duties, she was the one who had decided what “had to be done.” If she had too much to do, it was not simply because her sister Mary was not helping her, perhaps it was because her plans were too elaborate. Jesus told Martha, “only one thing is needed” and that one thing was a spending time with Jesus in a personal and intimate way. We must not get so wrapped up in our preparation for Christmas that we have no time for Christ.

Jesus was able to keep the main thing, the main thing. Jesus was often challenged by the Pharisees, Sadducees, and other religious leaders of his day. Anytime they asked him a question, he always focused on the deeper matters behind the question. The Pharisees asked, “Should we pay taxes to

Caesar?” And, Jesus answered, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's.” And the Sadducees asked about the resurrection, and Jesus turned them back to the Scriptures. Jesus was able to focus on those things which were of most importance. If we're Christ like, we won't let our impatience, or even someone else's impatience take our focus off love and patience and generosity. If we commit to Christ-likeness, we'll remember it's more important to show love, mercy and grace than it is to

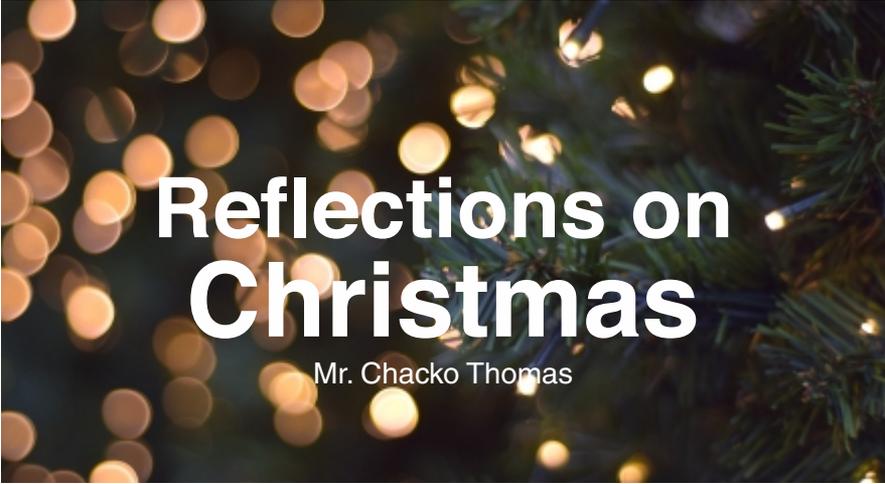
worry about being inconvenienced during the busy time of the year.



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*“In Him was life,
and the life was the light of men.
And the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not comprehend it.”
– John 1:4-5*



Reflections on Christmas

Mr. Chacko Thomas

“Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let Earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.”

(Isaac Watts, written in 1719, based on Psalm 98.)

I never seem to get tired of this Christmas Carol or any of the other Carols. Another one of my favourites is, “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” by the great song writer Charles Wesley, written in 1739.

There is something “magical”, isn't there, about Christmas? This is especially so in the English-speaking world where they have

been celebrating Christmas for hundreds of years as indicated by the songs mentioned above.

Children dream of Christmas Father and his fantasy sleigh. The adults picture the lights, Christmas trees, Presents, Christmas lunch, and family gathering. Then, there is the decorating of homes, churches, towns, and cities.

There was the annual Christmas Day speech by the Queen, lasting about nine minutes at 3.00pm sharp, a tradition in the UK and the Commonwealth. She most usually made mention of her personal faith in the Lord Jesus and the Bible that has helped her throughout her life and service. There is a recent book about the late Queen entitled “The Servant Queen and

the King she serves”.

More than a Christian festival.

Arguably, it is the greatest of all international festivals. Not much of it for any spiritual reasons. Only Mothers' Day cards are sold more than Christmas Cards around the world. Countries like Singapore start decorating their shopping malls, especially the area around the Orchard Road, as early as November, purely for economic reasons, of course. London and other cities in the west are not to be left behind. The annual White House Christmas Tree and Presidential pardoning of the Turkey is well known.

However, in recent years, the “Peace on earth” celebration has been broken into by anti-Christian terrorists blowing up and maiming hundreds of people in churches. It is worth praying for a safe celebration of Christmas this year in places like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Egypt, and all other nations, including India.

What a story it is! The whole Bible, not just the two Gospels, speaks of Christmas. The first glimpse of Christmas is found in Genesis 3, soon after the Fall of Adam and Eve. A male child called the “Seed of the woman”, is promised by God. Here, Jesus enters the human race. Its last

mention is in Revelation 12. Here we have heaven's perspectives of the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth. It shows a pregnant woman in labour pain, a large red dragon stood in front of the woman ready to devour her baby as soon as he was born. “She gave birth to a son who was to rule all the nations with an iron rod. And her child was ... caught up to God and to His throne”. (Revelation 12: 1-5.NLT). Looks like we have the whole life of Jesus squeezed into a few words.

A thousand or so years after Genesis 3, in Noah, a direct descendant of Adam, the birth of Jesus is narrowed down to his son Shem's family, one of Noah's three sons. Hundreds of years later, it is further narrowed to one of Shem's descendants, Abraham. About a thousand years later, one of Abraham's descendants David, is named. Jesus is to be a son of King David and he is to rule the universe forever. By Isaiah's time, hundreds of years after David, we are told that Jesus would be born of a virgin, a daughter in David's family.

Isaiah's words are read at Christmas, in churches around the world. Isaiah 7:14 reads “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin

will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.” Isaiah goes on to fill in many details of Jesus' life and work, more fully than other prophets like Moses, David, Micah, or Zechariah. Isaiah is known as the Gospel prophet, his book as the “Gospel according to” Isaiah.

Mrs. Tina Stacey writes, “Jesus Christ's first coming was prophesied around 137 times in the Old Testament [books] of the Bible hundreds of years before he was born in Bethlehem”. Tina continues, “There are over 200 prophecies regarding His Second Coming in both the Old and New Testament.” (Taken from Tina's leaflet “... Good News”).

Here is another one of those prophecies of Isaiah that is normally heard at Christmas services across the world: “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and

forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7)

I like Isaiah's statement, “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.” Only God could have orchestrated the coming Christ to earth over these thousands of years to the day when he was born in Bethlehem. There were times that the line of Jesus was hanging by a thread. Yet, all the 137 or more predictions were fulfilled exactly. I have no doubt that “the Zeal of the Lord” will complete the rest of the predictions and promises relating to our Lord's return.

No religion or Government or the devil himself will be able to stand in God's way. Many across the world have tried but failed. A recent edition of a national magazine “India Today” reports of a great turning to the Lord in the State of Punjab. Apparently, there is one church in Punjab where they have 300,000 worshippers of the Lord Jesus, perhaps the largest church in India. All this is taking place 'under the nose' of people trying to stamp out Christianity in India with the support of government and political machineries. God seems to be saying, “Look, who is in charge here!”

It is about 750 years since Isaiah made those incredible prophecies. “We come now at last to the culmination of the Old Testament, the event to which the prophets have all in their different ways been leading, namely the nativity, the birth of the Messiah, especially as the story is told by Matthew and Luke. We are immediately struck by a change of atmosphere. Not only are these early Gospel narratives steeped in Old Testament language and culture, but they are also accompanied by the miraculous. ... it is surely fitting that a supernatural person should enter the world in a supernatural way. ...” writes John Stott in his “Through the Bible – Through the Year”.

For Week 17, Rev. Stott writes about seven topics:

The Annunciation: “God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth ... to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph” Luke 1: 26-27

Mary's Song: “My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in my God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant” Luke 1:46-48

The Virgin Birth: “The Holy Spirit will come upon 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

Mary's submission: “I am the Lord's servant”, Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Luke 1:38

Bethlehem: “She gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:7

The Shepherds: “There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby. ... An angel of the Lord appeared to them ... [and] said to them, “... I bring you good news of great joy. ... Today ... a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:8-11

The Fulness of Time: “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son” Galatians 4:4

About the seven topics covered for week 18, Rev. Stott wrote: “So, now the question is how the world responded. We have already seen how the shepherds responded. This week we will consider other responses – by the Magi, Herod the Great, Simeon, and by later Church leaders like the apostles Paul and John. Their responses were

varied, ranging from acceptance to rejection, from the Magi's desire to worship Jesus to Herod's determination to destroy him. One might even say that the whole New Testament consists of responses to God's mighty acts in Jesus Christ."

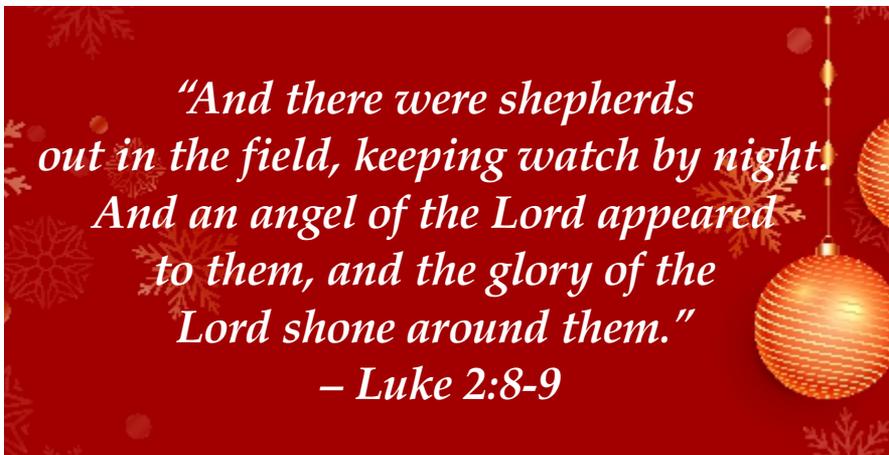
Thank God for those of us who had been blessed by the gift of God to us, the Lord Jesus. The apostle Paul called Christmas "God's indescribable gift" to mankind. What a powerful story is Christ's story. The greatest story ever told. God has done his part, both by coming down to earth and dying for our sins and rising from the dead. What is left is our part in the story, to make this Jesus known so that what is happening in the Punjab can happen all over India and all over the world. Would you rededicate your life to Jesus at this

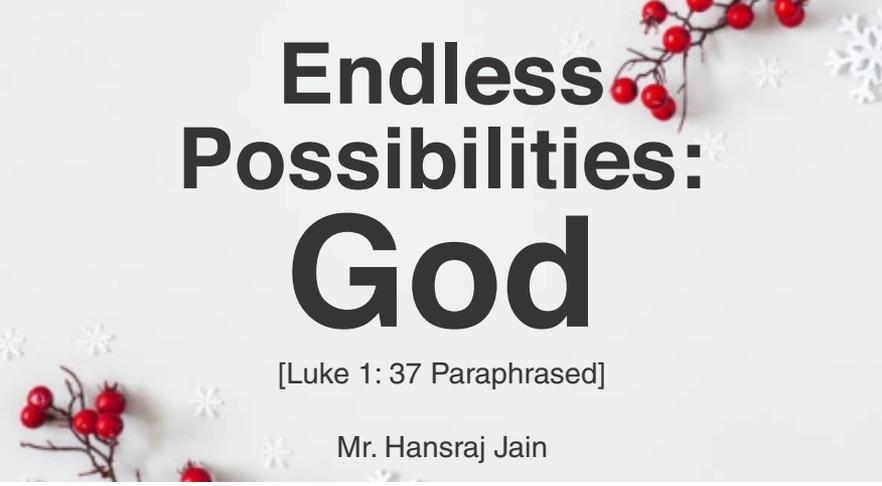
Christmas? Would you make Him known to the world? Take a stand for Jesus today.



Mr. Chacko Thomas

is presently a Minister-at-large with Operation Mobilisation. He served for 15 years on the OM Ships Logos, Doulos, and Logos II. His ministry has taken him to 107 countries in six continents. One of his few passions is to see the earth filled with the knowledge of the Lord and His values blessing the nations. He can be contacted on chacko.thomas@om.org





Endless Possibilities: God

[Luke 1: 37 Paraphrased]

Mr. Hansraj Jain

"Stop. What did you just say?"
She asked in disbelief.

"How could you make such an absurd statement and unrealistic offer? Logically and rationally, how is it even possible for me to believe you, coming as you have out of nowhere? I don't know you from Adam. And yet, with such an impossible message, you have made me the offer of a lifetime? Why me?"

The messenger (whom she had never seen before) was so out of this world. And his message was even more ludicrous and outlandish. Yet, he sounded so confident. "Nothing is impossible

for him who sent me with this offer", he had declared with seldom-seen confidence.

It was his demeanour that challenged her and piqued her curiosity. Should she dare?

Dare she did. Yet, thoughts lingered, and the debate in her heart persisted.

"Could you really believe such a message, pregnant with an incredible future?" she debated with herself.

"Once the offer is accepted, there is no going back. Not ever! You dounderstand that, right?" she asked herself.

"*Proof of the pie is in the eating*", she whispered to herself. She had nodded her assent to him. That is when, having received her positive answer, he left her to her own devices. Now, she had to determine and work out what she would do with the information to which she had consented. He was just a messenger. But one with a standing in the Court.

For her, that information was life-altering, most certainly. It could also be life-endangering for her and may even have repercussions for her family.

As she pondered, she thought of the consequences for her and her family. The more she thought about it, the more determined she grew. In the end, she told herself that she had to find out the actuality of his offer and his claim for herself.

So, she packed her little bag and set off. It would be a long journey, she knew. But, she told herself, "*I don't mind, and I don't care. I have to find out. I have to verify the facts. My life and those of my family members depend on it.*" That thought drove her. She loved

her family, and the more she thought about them, the more determined she became. Finally, she had resolved that at all costs, she would allow no aspersions, ever, to be cast on her family. It did not matter the price she would end up paying. He had promised her a future and he had better be true to his word. Moreover, he had pledged to her that her acceptance of the offer would have a global impact. That's why now her very existence mattered.

The visitor had concluded with these words at the end of his conversation, saying, "*For nothing is impossible with God.*" (TLLDB).

Now, she needed proof to prove. That was the reason for this long trek. She was trekking to meet her cousin-sister living in the hills. And, she was pretty senior to her.

Her cousin's name was Elizabeth [Liz for short!]. And Liz's visiting cousin's name was Mary, Joseph-ben-David's fiancée!

Liz displayed Mary the enlarging belly and assured her visiting cousin that with their God, there

are "Endless Possibilities". God was going to accomplish the impossible with them and through them. And it wasn't going to be just for their families either! The unbelievable acts of God in their lives will have global implications. The impact will be so powerful that world history will never be the same. Yet, the enormous accomplishments of God were to be as simple as simple can be!

By implication, for those of us who live today, it means that everyone who listens to Mary's and Liz's confessions and believes by the action of acceptance and follows as disciples would follow their Master, shall have an eternal inheritance. These followers, in turn, will have the privilege to pass on their eternal inheritance as a lasting legacy to their posterity.

This offer has been global in scope and not limited to Liz or Mary and their household. Nor can it be determined by the

communities and nations. The Brand "Jesus Christ the Saviour of the World" was and has retained its space for two thousand and two hundred years. Today, this Brand worldwide is celebrated as "**Christmas**". (Lk 2:11,12; Is 9:6, Jn 1:45).

May we, this 25 December, celebrate a fresh *Christ-of-Christmas* because he has become our personally chosen King, Saviour and Good Shepherd.

Forever!

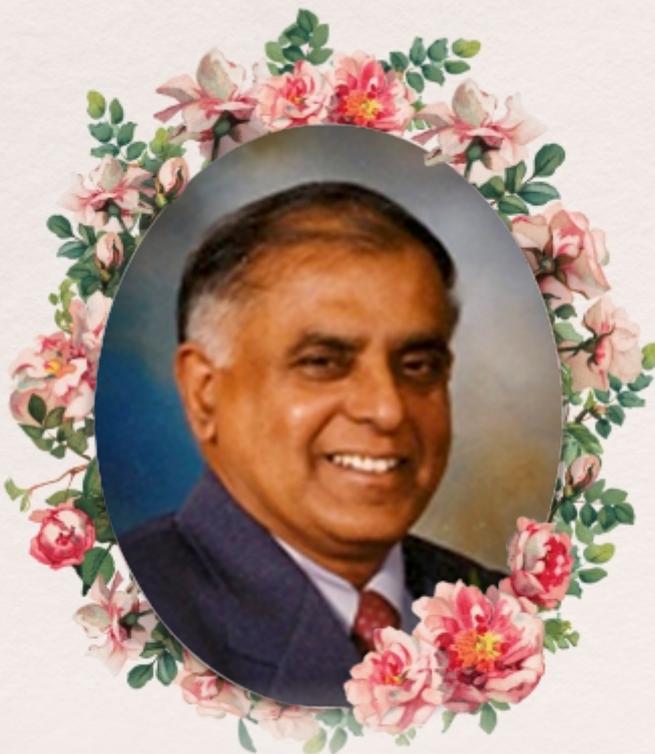


Mr. Hansraj Jain

Managing Director, Family, Marriage & Human Relationships, INHERITORS.

NB: Know that Christmas minus Christ is a mere festival.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." – Luke 2:14



Tribute to Rev. Dr. Francis Sunderaraj- A life well lived.

Evangelical Fellowship of India deeply grieves the passing of Rev. Dr. Francis Sunderaraj, our former General Secretary and beloved leader.

Dr. Sunderaraj was a man of faith and integrity. He loved the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart and served Him to the best of his

capacity during his lifetime through preaching, teaching, training, counselling and writing. He served on the Boards of many Christian institutions including the Union Biblical Seminary and authored books and resources on the Evangelical movement in India.

Even in his later years, Dr. Sunderaraj served the Church in India through his writings that we at EFI were privileged to published through the AIM magazine. His godly wisdom, spiritual insight and wise counsel brought encouragement to many. He will be greatly missed.

Dr. Sunderaraj was born on April 7, 1937 at Madras (Chennai) to Mr. Abraham Devaraj James and Mrs. Sophia David. At a young age at a Youth for Christ rally in Madras, he committed his life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

He graduated with a secondary school certificate from St. Paul's High School in 1952 and went on to do his Bachelor of Science (Chemistry) from Madras Christian College in 1955. Between 1955 to 1962, he worked as a chemist, first for the Corporation of Madras, then for private companies.

In 1961, during a Deeper Life convention at Emmanuel Methodist Church in Madras, he committed his life to full-time Christian service and then went on to pursue his Bachelor of Divinity from the Union Biblical Seminary in Yeotmal, completing it in 1965.

Later he would go on to earn his Masters of Theology from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1971 and Masters in Intercultural Studies at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, in 1994. He was conferred the Doctor of Letters in December 1995 from Biola University.

After his graduation from Union Biblical Seminary, he entered pastoral ministry serving first as the Associate Pastor at Emmanuel Methodist Church from 1965 to 1967.

On December 29, 1965, Dr. Sunderaraj got married to Sheila

Bhanumathy Devasahayam. God blessed them with two children Mallika Ruth and Vinodh Samuel.

He served as a Pastor with the Methodist Churches in eastern Malaysia between 1967 to 1970 and during this time also served as a District Superintendent for the newly formed Tamil Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia.

His teaching assignment brought him back to his Alma Mater, Union Biblical Seminary where he taught from 1971 to 1972.

He resumed his pastoral responsibilities in 1972, functioning as the Circuit pastor of three Methodist churches in Malaysia till 1974 and then took on the responsibility as the Pastor of the largest Indian church in Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. During this time he also served as the District Superintendent for the Methodist Church in Malaysia.

In 1976, he became the Associate Secretary for the Christian Education department of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (CEEFI) and was confirmed as Secretary in 1978. He would serve in this role till 1991 revitalizing CEEFI and making it the most popular Sunday School Curriculum in India and beyond.

Dr. Sunderaraj became the General Secretary of Evangelical Fellowship of India in 1984 serving till the year 1996. He also served as the General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia from 1994 till 2001.

During his illustrious journey of Christian service, Dr. Sunderaraj touched thousands of lives and mentored hundreds of leaders, many of whom are serving Christ today in different capacities.

Even though he was busy with his ministry commitments, he was well known as an encourager of leaders and would often call people up to know how they and their families are and to pray for them.

In recent years, he was active on social media and instant messaging

thus encouraging many in their walk with the Lord. His wife and he loved to receive visitors at the Richmond Town Methodist Church Senior Citizens Home in Bengaluru.

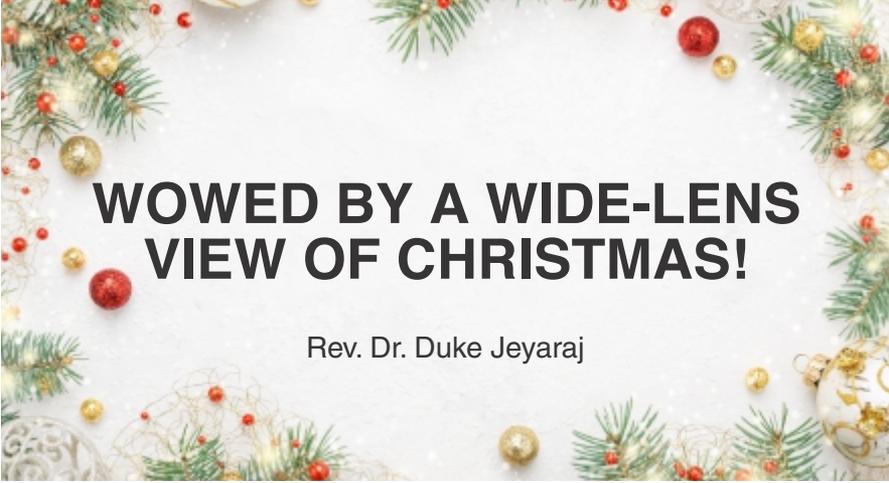
In the evening of November 24, he suffered breathlessness and was taken to the hospital where he passed away and stepped into glory in the presence of the Lord whom he served till the very end.

We thank God for his life and his example; for a life well lived and a race run well for the glory of God.

Do remember his dear wife, Aunty Bhanu to most of us, and his children Mallika Ruth, Vinodh Samuel and their families, in your prayers.

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among
the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.*

Micah 5:2



WOWED BY A WIDE-LENS VIEW OF CHRISTMAS!

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

Different writers of the Bible used various styles and imagery to describe the Christmas story. Using Holy Spirit-inspired colors, they painted the Christmas Story in a wide range of colors! Yes, Matthew and Luke narrated the historic Christmas story. But other New Testament writers – notably Paul, John, and the Hebrews-author – go back to the same Christmas event and explain its theological meanings and implications. Let's look at Christmas using a wide-lens, taking into account the writings of as many different New Testament writers as possible!

Paul described Christmas this way: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his

Son, born of woman..” (Gal. 4:4). For Paul, Christmas was all about the impeccable TIMING. Jesus came to the planet at the time designed by the Trinity. If God came to the earth as a sinless, perfect human at the right time, he knows the right time to remove that sickness you are presently enduring and give you the promotion you are eagerly expecting! We must learn to salute the Sovereignty of God who is always “on time” when it comes to working miracles on our behalf even though, at times, he may be “four days late” (John 11:39) (as one song-writer memorably put it).

John portrayed Christmas this way: “The Word became flesh

and made His dwelling (tabernacle) among us...” (John 1:14). For John, Christmas was about TABERNACLE. This world is not our home, and we are just tabernacling – passing – through this world! As Jonathan Edwards put it, we go about our earthly tenure with 'eternity stamped on our eyeballs'.

The Hebrews-writer envisioned Christmas this way: “Now since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity, so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil...” (Heb. 2:14). For the Hebrews-writer, Christmas was all about TERROR-REMOVAL. Jesus was born so that he would die and rise again and thereby open the door to remove the commonest fear among humans – the fear of death. And to die, he needed flesh and blood like us, humans. And during the first Christmas, he chose to clothe himself with flesh and blood! So, no fear needs to grip us – the fear of an examination, the fear of a job-loss, the fear of another crippling pandemic, the fear of not being up-to-the-mark in the

responsibilities given to us, the fear of....!

John wrote again about Christmas choosing another thing to focus upon in 2 John. He wrote there: 'For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist' (2 John 7). For him, here, Christmas was all about TRUTH-GUARDING. By being born in the flesh – born as a baby into our planet – Jesus was showcasing the importance of the human body. The one who filled the universe would now live inside the body of a woman – her womb! And once he came out of her womb, he would exist in a human body coping with all its restrictions of having to be in one place at one time (something that was strange for the God who was everywhere present)! The human body cannot become a playground for sexual immorality. If you did not believe in Christmas – God's coming in the flesh – then it would not be a big deal for you to indulge the flesh! So, if you really believed in Christmas, you will be motivated to live a sexually

pure life! That was John's point in 2 John.

John was not tired of writing about Christmas time and again! He kept coming back to Christmas to expound the theological implications of Christ as the Spirit of God prodded him to. He gives us a peek of Christmas in Revelation 12, I believe: the Sun-clothed woman's baby was about to be devoured by Satan the moment he was born (Rev. 12:4). Remember how Herod tried to finish off the new born baby Jesus? This Revelation 12 male child, obviously Jesus, was “destined to rule the nations” (Rev. 12:5). Satan also was keen on waging an ongoing battle with the “rest of the children” of the sun-clothed woman (Rev. 12:17). The rest of the children of the sun-clothed – symbolic of believers and Christ-followers – were to hang in there for 1260 days in the wilderness (Rev. 12:14). 1260 days! Does the number ring a bell? It certainly rang a bell among the original readers of John's letter! They knew that was a code word used by the apostles often to remind

believers of those days to become more and more like the One who ministered on this earth for 1260 days, i.e. three and half years – even Jesus! So, the call of Christmas, from John, from Revelation 12 is that of a TRANSFORMATION – a call to be transformed in character like Jesus' character, more and more in our “wilderness” journey!

Using the “flood” from his mouth, Satan (see Rev. 12:15) will try to drown believers. That reminds me of the “flood” of false teaching Satan has unleashed using the mouths of false-teachers who have surrendered their mouths to him. Using those Satan-inspired mouths, they teach hell-populating teaching like hyper-grace, immortality on earth, hyper-supernaturalism, etc. to drown believers. John writes, 'But the earth helped the woman and opened its mouth to swallow up the river that had poured from the dragon's mouth' (Rev. 12:16). This is simply another way of saying that one day the earth will open up and swallow Satan-inspired false-teachers, the way it opened up and swallowed Korah and his rebellion gang in the Old Testament. It is an imagery of

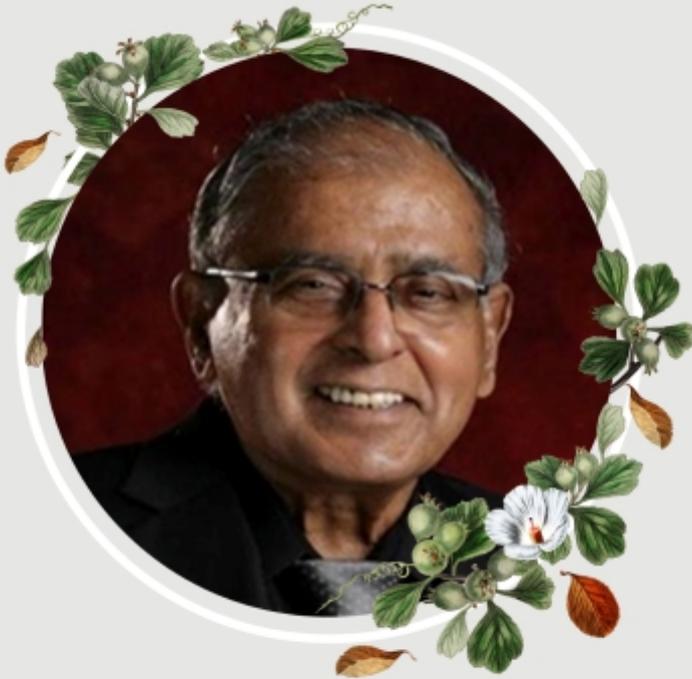
judgment: earth opening up and swallowing. It points to the hell-destination of false teachers and those who buy their theology, I believe. So, understanding this seemingly-complex-yet-simple imagery of Revelation 12 brings us back to the message of TRUTH-GAURDING. Obeying the commands of God – holding onto the written Word of God and making it our basis for all matters of belief and behaviour - and holding onto our testimony – testimony via life and lips - is what enrages Satan, John writes, he wraps his 'Christmas' commentary in the book of Revelation (Rev. 12:17). Let's celebrate a Christmas where the focus is not on being ENTERTAINED by SANTA CLAUS but on ENRAGING SATAN!

This wide-lens view of Christmas is wow, isn't it?



Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj,

an Agri. Engineer turned M. Div. Gold Medalist and Doctor Of Ministry Graduation Speaker, is the founder of Grabbing the Google Generation from Gehenna Mission, the G4 Mission. This is a para-church ministry to present-day people functioning from Chennai. God has graciously opened doors for him to preach in over 20 Indian states and in a few other nations right from the first time Duke preached, as a school boy of 16, in the year 1991. He has authored three books: Straight Talk (Sex, Love, Marriage, Porn, Phone Addiction, married-sex, etc., – what the Bible says), Daniel in Dell (practical study of the book of Daniel for modern working professionals), Goodnews for the Google Generation (the Gospel presented the way Jesus did in Luke 13 and the way Paul did in Acts 17). Reach him via emailduke@gmail.com or WhatsApp, +91-8886040605, in case you want to buy these or have a question. Duke is married to Evangelin, Odisha Missionary's daughter, and this couple are blessed with two children – Dale, 19, St. Stephens Delhi, and Datasha, 15, Class X.)



Tribute to Rev. Dr. Francis Sunderaraj

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) joins the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA) in mourning the passing of Rev. Dr. Francis Sunderaraj, a Christian leader and servant of the body of Christ in India, Asia and the world.

WEA Secretary General Bishop Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher paid tribute to Sunderaraj saying, “Many holy men and women of global stature have served in the International Council of the WEA over the years. Dr. Sunderaraj was one of them, serving on the IC for a long time and representing Asia's and India's passion for world mission in the best way possible. I could experience this myself already as a youngster when meeting him for the first time in India in 1986, together with the President of the WEA at that time Theodore Williams who was also from India. His Bible studies at

several WEA General Assemblies proved his love for Holy Scripture and helped to shape my own way of preaching the gospel. He also always assured that the Methodist perspectives stayed a vital part of the overall mix of the worldwide evangelical movement. May God bless the Church in India for the gift to our global family.”

AEA Chairman Mr. Godfrey Yogarajah, who also serves on the WEA International Council, and AEA General Secretary Dr. Bambang Budijanto issued a joint tribute.

The Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA) expresses our heartfelt condolences at the passing away of Rev. Dr. Francis Sunderaraj, a former General Secretary of the AEA.

His contribution to the evangelical movement in his home country of India, Asia and beyond is illustrious and noteworthy. He will be greatly missed.

Dr. Sunderaraj was a chemist, a pastor, a preacher, teacher, educationist and the author of books and resources for the building up of the Church in India and beyond.

He was used by God in pastoral ministry both in India and Malaysia with the Methodist Church. Later, he served with the Evangelical Fellowship of India – first as the Secretary for Christian Education and subsequently, as General Secretary.

He became the 3rd General Secretary of the Asia Evangelical Alliance, formerly known as the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia, and served in that capacity from 1994 until 2001.

We remember his wife Mrs. Sheila Bhanu Sunderaraj, children Ruth Mallika and Vinodh and their families and pray that the peace of God would surround them, and His presence would be their comfort during this time of grief.

“If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” (Romans 14:8)



REV. P. M. THOMAS A TRIBUTE

The steam engine train and buses took 16 days to take Thomas and family from Trivandrum to Udhampur. Thomas became the pioneer indigenous missionary to Kashmir 59 years ago.

Born as the grandson of K A Thomas, one of the Founders of the Marthoma Evangelistic Mission, (the very first indigenous mission in India), committed himself to cross cultural mission as a teenager. In spite of the severe financial constraints in the large family, Thomas never deviated from the Lord's call. Prepared himself with theological study and Hindi language study in the midst of many limitations.

Rev Thomas planted the first church in Udhampur, in the days when there was no church in the entire stretch from Jammu to Shri Nagar. When the communal elements opposed the church construction and got a Stay Order from the Government, Thomas in distress suffered a heart attack. Prayed much, got assurance from the Lord, wrote directly to Indira Gandhi the Prime Minister and got the stay order revoked.

A man of indomitable courage and endurance in sufferings for the Lord, impacted many youngsters to enter pioneer mission work and established 36 mission centers by the year 1994 with 96 missionaries. Out of his ministry and mentoring several other missions and mission leaders emerged.

Not limiting with the Kashmir work, Thomas saw the need for the eastern part of the Himalayas. Handing over the Kashmir work to his son Santhosh he moved eastward and started the Himalayan Evangelical Mission. Today the work has spread to Nepal, Bhutan and Burma. Both his children and all his extended family are in the ministry.

Rev. P. M. Thomas was 90 at his demise. He was the Founder of Kashmir Evangelical Fellowship and Himalayan Evangelical Mission in Gorakhpur UP.

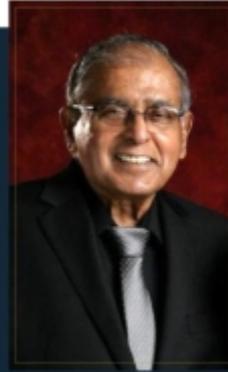
We had the privilege of working closely with Rev Thomas in the India Missions association. As the senior most among us he was a pillar of strength to the IMA fraternity. May his life and work inspire many youngsters for mission.

Ebe Sunder Raj

Former Head of India Missions association



A Tribute to
REV. DR.
**FRANCIS
SUNDERARAJ**
The Third AEA General Secretary



The Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA) expresses our heartfelt condolences at the passing away of Rev. Dr. Francis Sunderaraj, a former General Secretary of the AFA.

His contribution to the evangelical movement in his home country of India, Asia and beyond is illustrious and noteworthy. He will be greatly missed.

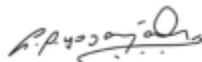
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So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (Romans 14:8).*



Godfrey Yogarajah
Chairman



Bambang Budijanto, Ph.D.
General Secretary - CEO



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Intercessory Prayer Points



December 2022

1 THURSDAY Thank God as you enter this Christmas season. Pray that God would refresh and rejuvenate you as you prepare for the birth of the King of kings. May God bless you and your family.

2 FRIDAY 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.

3 SATURDAY 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.

4 SUNDAY 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.

5 MONDAY 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. Continue to pray for the revamping of the syllabus to progress well.

6 TUESDAY 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.

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

8 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.

9 FRIDAY 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.

10 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.

11 SUNDAY Pray for your pastor(s) as they teach 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.

12 MONDAY Pray for Bharat Susamachar Samiti, Dehradun. BSS has been serving the community very effectively for the last many years. Pray that God would continue to use this ministry so that many lives may be transformed.

13 TUESDAY 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.

14 WEDNESDAY 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.

15 THURSDAY 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.

16 FRIDAY 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.

17 SATURDAY 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.

18 SUNDAY 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 MONDAY Pray for the children section of your Church. Pray that they would encounter Christ in the manger this Christmas and that experience would give have a life-long impact in their lives.

20 TUESDAY Pray for the poor and the needy in your neighbourhood. Pray and think of ways you can be of any help to them. May God enable you to share what you have with them as a token of your love for Jesus.

21 WEDNESDAY 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.

22 THURSDAY 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

23 FRIDAY 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.

24 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.

25 SUNDAY Thank God for His precious gift of eternal life through His Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that the Lord Jesus Christ would be lifted high as we celebrate His birth today. Pray also that His kingdom would be extended far and wide for God's glory.

26 MONDAY 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.

27 TUESDAY 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.

28 WEDNESDAY 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.

29 THURSDAY 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.

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

31 SATURDAY Thank God for His love and compassion extended to us through Christ. Pray that God would lead you to a new and fruitful year 2023.

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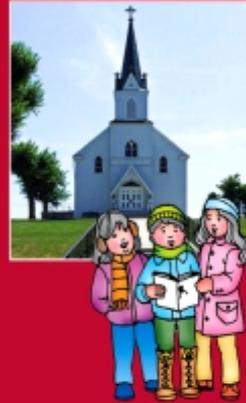
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