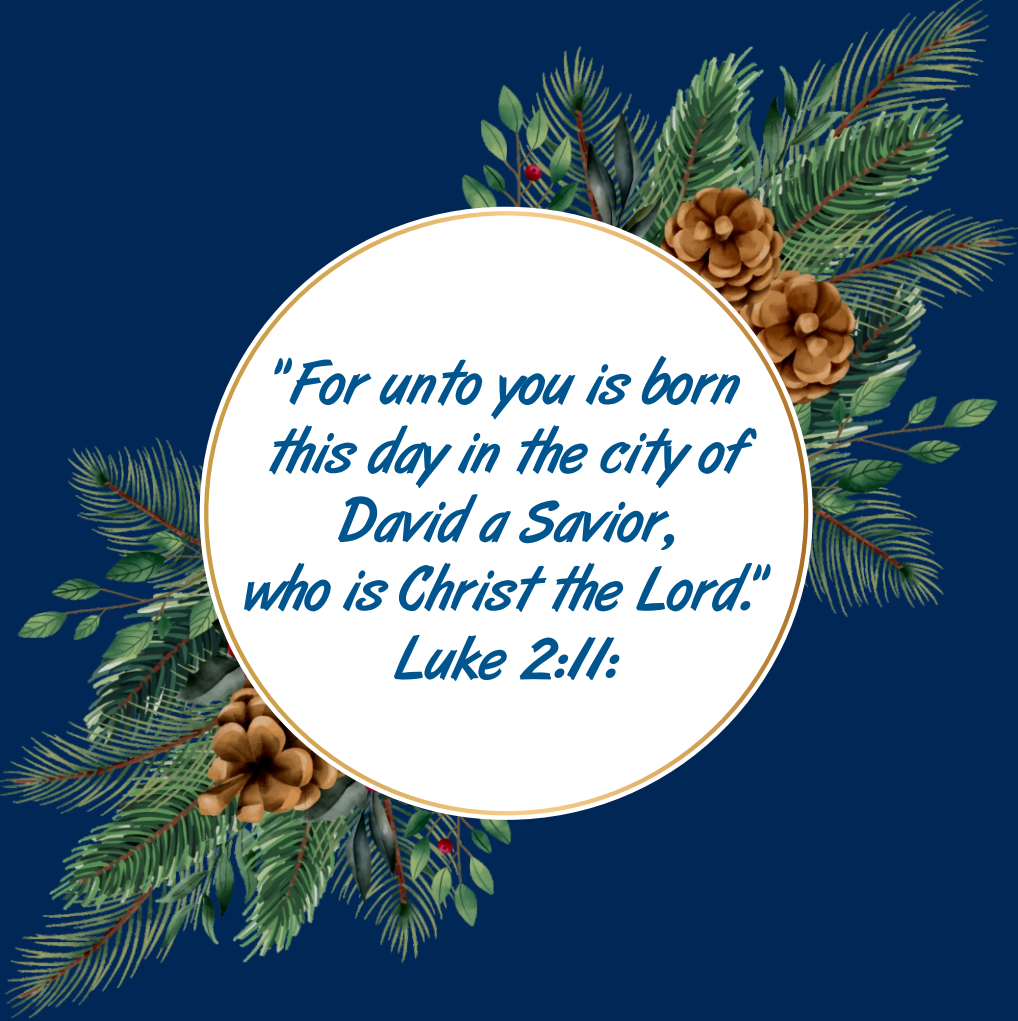


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A Journey of Faith



*"For unto you is born
this day in the city of
David a Savior,
who is Christ the Lord."
Luke 2:11:*



Evangelical
Fellowship of India

*For unto you is born this day in the city of David
a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

Luke 2:11

Evangelical Fellowship of India
Wishes you

*Merry
Christmas* 
& HAPPY NEW YEAR





A Journey of Faith contents

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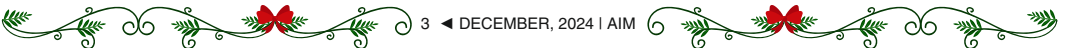
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Editorial 



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

When Light Pierces the Dark: Christmas in a Shadowed World

“Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing which the Lord has made known to us” (Luke 2:15). This shepherd's invitation, first uttered in the darkness of a Judean night, echoes across two millennia to reach us in our own shadowed time.

From the devastating humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza to the ongoing challenges in Ukraine, from climate disasters to economic uncertainties, we find ourselves navigating through deep shadows. Closer home, our nation grapples with violence in Manipur, religious tensions and persecution, economic disparities, and social challenges that often seem to darken our

path. Yet it is precisely amid these shadows - not apart from them - that we are called to make our own journey to Bethlehem.

The profound paradox of the Incarnation lies not just in the Word becoming flesh, but in where this mystery unfolds. Christ was born not in an illuminated palace but in the darkness of a cave. This historical detail carries deep significance: the Light of the World chose to first shine in a place of intense darkness. Even today, the cave of the Nativity remains a dark space, a powerful testament to the truth proclaimed in John's Gospel: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has



not overcome it" (John 1:5).

This divine pattern - light piercing darkness rather than avoiding it - reveals the heart of God's redemptive work. As St. Athanasius reflected, in the divine condescension, the Second Person of the Trinity entered our darkness to transform it from within. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21) - the Light Himself descending into our shadows to illuminate them.

We sing in our carols, "Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light." This isn't mere poetic sentiment but an insightful theological truth. The shadows of our world - whether personal struggles, societal conflicts, or global crises - can serve to draw us closer to Christ's light through sincere prayer, honest confession of our sins, and above all, holy living and witness.

As Indian Christians, we understand this interplay of light and darkness deeply. Our cultural heritage has long recognized the

triumph of light over darkness, yet Christmas reveals something unprecedented - not just light overcoming darkness, but Light becoming incarnate within it. In Jesus, we encounter what St. Irenaeus celebrated: divine light penetrating human darkness to reveal "the glory of God is a human being fully alive."

Today's challenges - artificial intelligence's ethical dilemmas, climate change's existential threats, social media's tribal divisions and an unequal, unjust society - may cast long shadows. Yet it is the annual celebration of Christmas that allows many around us to glimpse the heritage of Christian faith, hope, and charity. This has been the light illuminating our pathway throughout history.

We see this light piercing contemporary darkness through the sacrificial work of healthcare professionals in remote villages, interfaith initiatives building bridges of understanding, environmental stewards caring for creation, and countless acts of Christ-like love. Each reflects



what Orthodox theology calls theosis – humanity's gradual transformation by divine light.

darkness - both historical and personal - but leads to unquenchable light.

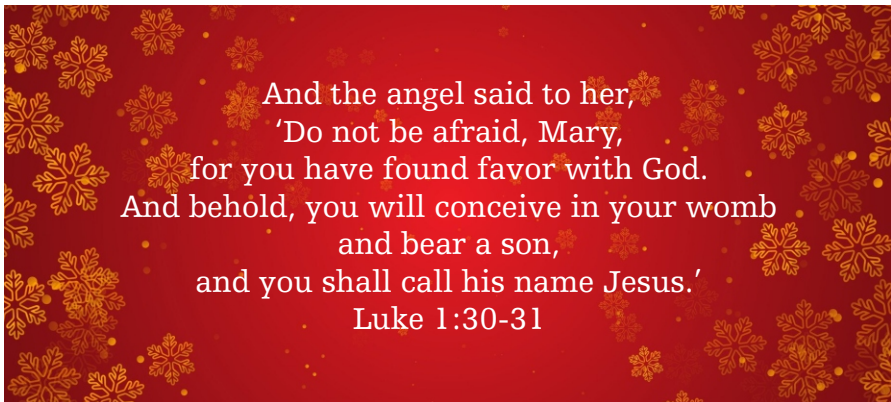
The Church declares at Christmas: "The night is made radiant with the splendour of true light," inviting us once more to "walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you" (John 12:35). This isn't an invitation to escape darkness but to transform it through our presence, just as Christ did in that Bethlehem cave.

As we gather this Christmas - in urban cathedrals and village churches alike – we're invited to "stand still and see the salvation of God." For the Light that first shone in a dark cave continues its transformative work, reminding us that no darkness - personal, societal, or cosmic - lies beyond the reach of divine redemption.

For in Jesus, we encounter not just momentary illumination but what the church fathers called the divine-human exchange: "The Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of men might become the sons of God." This transformation begins in

Amid every shadow of our time, may this Christmas renew our confidence and peace in this unchanging truth: the light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not, and will not, overcome it.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal





Shout Glory to the new-born King

Mr. Chacko Thomas

A Blessed Christmas to all believers and yet-to-believe people in India.

Christmas celebration number 2024 is here. The calendar reminds us that the great God of the universe came down from heaven to a particular place, on a particular day and "tabernacled" among us in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:1-14).

Miracle of all miracles!!! It is a miracle upon which all other miracles in the New Testament depend. Thank God for God's indescribable gift to His creation, to human race in particular (2 Corinthians 9: 15.)

Shout to the King, Glory!

It is like no other birthday.

I found this in an old book: "Italy celebrates Garibaldi, but Italy alone. France remembers Napoleon, but England despises him; no foreign nation observes Washington's birthday. But Jesus belongs to all nations of the earth. He shall reign supreme as the universal Master.

"Jesus Christ, Thou King of glory,
Born a Saviour-Prince to be,
While the angels hosts adore
Thee, We joy in Thee,
Singing of Thy grace the story,
Praise, praise to Thee." [taken from "Day by Day", A Moody Press Publications]

After Thousands of Years of Preparation:

Paul Bramsen in "Your Story" writes, "After thousands of years



of preparation, God's time had come to send the Messiah into the world. But *who* would He be? And *how* would He come? As foretold by the prophets, He would be born of a virgin from the family line of both Abraham and David. The Saviour of sinners would be conceived in such a way so as not to inherit Adam's sin nature. He would be the unique offspring of a woman."

"God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The Angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, '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. ... For nothing is impossible with God.'" [Luke 1:26-37]

Hark, how all the welkin rings, Glory to the King of Kings!":

"These are "the original words of Charles Wesley's Christmas carol first published in 1739. Fourteen years later the author changed those words to 'Hark! The herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King"', as we sing it today, writes Mr. Cliff Barrows, in "Hymns and Hymn Stories" by Billy Graham Team [1967].

Please allow me to let Mr. Cliff Barrows [1923 – 2016] take us through three stanzas of this great Christmas Carol written by Charles Wesley [1707 - 1788.] Barrows writes, "welkin" is an archaic word for "heavens" or sky," and so we see that Wesley begins his hymn with the song of the angels on the first Christmas morning. "Glory to God in the highest heaven ... and peace on earth, for all those pleasing Him" (Luke 2: 14, Living Gospels)." Below is the first stanza:

Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;



With angelic hosts proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!

"As we sing these deeply meaningful phrases, it soon becomes clear that this is something more than a simple Christian carol. The phrase "God and sinners reconciled" reminds us that Christ came, not to enforce political amity, but to bring peace between God and man.

"The Christmas story is told concisely in 2 Corinthians 5: 19 (New English Bible) "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."

"Of course this involves a change in us. As Romans 5: 1 (Living Letters) says, Since we have been made right in God's sight by faith in his promises, we can have real peace with Him because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us." This is the peace promised by the angels on Christmas morning." Below is Stanza two:

Christ, by highest Heav'n adored;
Christ the everlasting Lord;
Late in time, behold Him come,
Offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;

Hail th'incarnate Deity,
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus our Emmanuel.

"Throughout the Hymn Charles Wesley continues to probe the deep mystery of Christmas, the mystery we call the Incarnation. ... Philippians 2: 6 [Philips] puts it this way, 'For He, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man.'"

"Of course, Jesus was still God, and He often displayed His divine power and personality. But most men did not recognise Him as God because His divinity was hidden (the hymn says 'veiled') in human flesh. This is the Lord of heaven who was pleased to dwell as man with ordinary men [Emmanuel, God with us.] Below is the third stanza:

Hail the heav'nly Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die;
Born to raise the sons of earth,



Born to give them second birth.

"Finally, the hymn reminds us of the two more of Christ's names, given by Hebrew prophets long before His birth. The great passage in Isaiah 9: 6 foretells: '*The Prince of peace*'. Malachi 4: 2 speaks also of the coming of Christ. 'But unto you that fear my name shall the *Sun of righteousness* arise with healing in his wings.'

"Wesley adds his own commentary about this figure of Christ as the Sun. The Physical sun Without the sun, all plant life would die. Without vegetation, animal life could not subsist. In the same way, Jesus Christ is the source of our spiritual light and our spiritual life.

"Yes, Jesus' birth holds many mysteries. He who is immortal was born a mortal in order that man might live eternally with Him. He was born once that we may be born again.

"Many folks who join in singing the carols, sharing all the happy festivities of Christmas, are unwilling to think of Christ in this

way. It has been said that as long as we can keep Jesus as a charming baby in a manger, He makes no demands upon our lives.

"But Jesus was born to *die!* He grew up to manhood, lived a perfect life, and then died on the cross, and rose again for our eternal salvation.

"This is the true Christmas, we must acknowledge Him as our Lord, if we are to celebrate this season properly."



Mr. Chacko Thomas

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HEAVEN CAME DOWN

Rev. Kuruvillea Chandy



The angels sang, Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill to people.

...peace and goodwill...

How does our world understand peace to be? It seems to me that peace is just the interval between wars in our world today. While we are not at war right now, our country is at peace.

But there are other war fronts. Supposedly, there's a "war against corruption" but it targets only people who belong to political parties other than the ruling party. The moment they migrate to the ruling party they escape. Young and old are outraged by the depravity of rapists and the impotence of the

government, the judiciary and the police in ensuring that it ends.

When the angels sang that the birth of Christ brings peace, it must be remembered that they were communicating in the language of poor illiterate shepherds. They sang in their language and used the Hebrew word *shalom*. It's a loaded word. It doesn't talk of peace as the interval between wars. *Shalom* is peace that God gives His people, those who live under His sovereign rule.

When Jesus went to His hometown Nazareth, He read from the prophecy of Isaiah, The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good



news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Lk. 4:18-19; Isa. 61:1-2)

After He had read that, the Lord closed the scroll and simply said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled." In other words, He said, "It's all done." What did He mean? He claimed that God's rule had come to earth. The kingdom of God had come in His person. That's what Jesus said.

God with Us

Matthew connected the dots between the birth of Jesus and a prophecy of Isaiah that describes the Messiah as "Emmanuel" (1:23; cf. Isa.7:14). The name Emmanuel means "God with us." So, when you connect Isaiah's prophecy and Jesus' claim that the kingdom of God had arrived, you could say heaven had come to earth. The reason I say it that way is that we define heaven as wherever God is. So, when Emmanuel says, "it's done", the only conclusion is heaven has come to earth.

One thing that must be noted is

that the name Emmanuel is given to a baby who the angel said had to be called "Jesus" because He would "save His people from their sins" (Matt.1:21, 25). The gospel makes it clear that knowing Jesus as Saviour is essential to experiencing God with us. There is a gap between God and humankind, the gap created by our sinfulness and rebellion against Him. The only way that the gap can be bridged is when there is someone to close that gap, and Jesus did that by dying in our place to save us from our sinfulness and purchase our forgiveness and atonement. Jesus Himself said that He was the only way to the Father (Jn. 14:6). The apostles confessed that there is no other name under heaven by which people could be saved (Acts 4:12).

Years passed after the baby Jesus was born, and suddenly there was a crazy-looking prophet announcing, "The kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Sometime later, Jesus also started to preach, "The kingdom of God is at hand" (4:17). The *New International Version* translates that phrase "is at hand"



as "has come near". But the phrase "is at hand" is more graphic. It says that something is within reach, at our fingertips. It says that the kingdom of God is near enough to be touched, to hold in one's hands. Looking back on their experience, John said, "We beheld His glory" (Jn. 1:14, KJV). Later he wrote, That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete (1 Jn. 1:1-4).

Oh yes, the kingdom of God had come to earth, and people had touched heaven itself.

Heaven and Eternity

After some people had become His disciples, Jesus changed His message to "The kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. 17:21). He said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for

theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt.5:3).

Coming into God's kingdom is not a promise for the future. Jesus said that those who are poor in spirit will have the kingdom in the present. It is theirs.

Jesus said that only two kinds of people could have the assurance that the kingdom of God belonged to them. When His disciples thought that their great Teacher should not be disturbed by brats, Jesus told them not to stop children from coming to Him, because the kingdom of God belonged to those who are like them (Mk. 10:14). People must be converted like children to enter God's kingdom. They must lose their sense of self-sufficiency and become like children who are so dependent on parents. That's how we need to come to God—with a sense of being totally dependent on God alone. That is why the Pharisee didn't find acceptance with God. He was a self-sufficient man. He didn't need God. He offered his own goodness to God. He was so full of himself, that there was no room for God in his life. On the



other hand, the tax collector was so conscious of his unworthiness, that he didn't think that he could offer God anything of himself. He cried out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk. 18:9-14).

When Jesus came, He wasn't acceptable to the world (Jn. 1:11). They wanted Him to fit in with their ideas of how they were going to reach God. They wanted to do it on their own. They wanted to do things their way. But those who did receive Jesus, were given the power to become the sons of God (v.12). This is not to be viewed in a sexist way. In a patriarchal society, only sons were inheritors. So, what this simply means is that everyone who receives Jesus will become an inheritor. They will inherit the kingdom of God.

On game shows, the host or master of the game says to contestants, "Your time starts now." We're not in a reality or game show, but it's reality alright. And the Lord who came to tell us "The kingdom of God is within you", instead of saying "Your time starts now" says to us, "Your

eternity starts now."

When we think of heaven, the kingdom of God, and eternity, we think of everything "in the sweet by and by". We think of eternity as the everlasting life that starts after we die. But the Lord said, "This is eternity: to know You [God], and Him Whom You have sent" (17:3). Yes, eternity starts now.

Most of our hymns and sacred songs echo this idea that we experience God in the present and therefore heaven has touched our lives already. But some of the songs spell it out in so many words:

Heaven came down and glory filled my soul,
When at the cross the Saviour made me whole;
My sins were washed away -And my night was turned to day
-Heaven came down and glory filled my soul! -*John W Peterson*

The kingdom of our God is here
Heaven is in my heart
The presence of His majesty
Heaven is in my heart
And in His presence joy abounds
Heaven is in my heart
The light of holiness surrounds
Heaven is in my heart
His precious life on me
He spent
Heaven is in my heart
To give me life without an end
Heaven is in



my heart In Christ is all my confidence Heaven is in my heart The hope of my inheritance Heaven is in my heart—*Graham Kendrick*

However, it is important to note that He did not say it to all and sundry. He said that only to His disciples. The word "disciple" is not a religious word. It simply means "follower" or "learner". Thus, a disciple is one who chooses a teacher to follow. That is, a disciple is one who is a disciple by choice. It is a personal choice that a person makes.

How do you choose? God or mammon? Jesus or the world of power, possessions and pleasure? These questions must be asked as we celebrate Christmas because these are days when anybody and everybody who has a decorated tree and a Santa suit says that they are celebrating Christmas. But can you really celebrate Christmas without Christ? Sadly, even those who call themselves Christians often celebrate Christmas without Christ. He is definitely not at their parties. He is not referred to, though Christmas music may play in the

background. No prayer to Jesus is offered, and sometimes things that don't honour Jesus happen at these parties.

When the angels sang at Jesus' birth, they sang of "peace and goodwill." That second word has all to do with relationship. Do you have one with Jesus? Have you chosen Him as your Teacher for life?

Jesus is Coming Again

As His time on earth was coming to an end, Jesus went back to saying, "...the kingdom of God is near" (Lk. 21:31). That's because even though the kingdom had come in the person of Jesus, and God's rule moved into the lives those who submitted to Jesus as His disciples, the world was still under a prince who had nothing to do with Jesus (Jn. 14:30). Jesus said that sentence had been passed against the prince of this world and he would be cast out (12:31; 16:11). But right now, there is a prince of this world, and it isn't Jesus.

But Jesus will return and make the kingdoms of this world His kingdom. That is when the



kingdom of God will finally arrive fully.

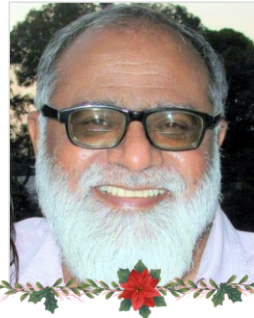
The big question is: who is your prince today? Who rules your heart now? Is Jesus the one who rules you or is it the prince of this world?

People lull themselves into complacency by imagining that when the time finally comes, they will be able to repent and switch allegiance and begin to serve Jesus as the new King. Sadly, this is not how things turn out. The book of Revelation shows that in the end those who serve the prince of this world, are quite unrepentant. They join forces with the Devil and the Antichrist to fight the True King (9:20-21).

The question of who rules you

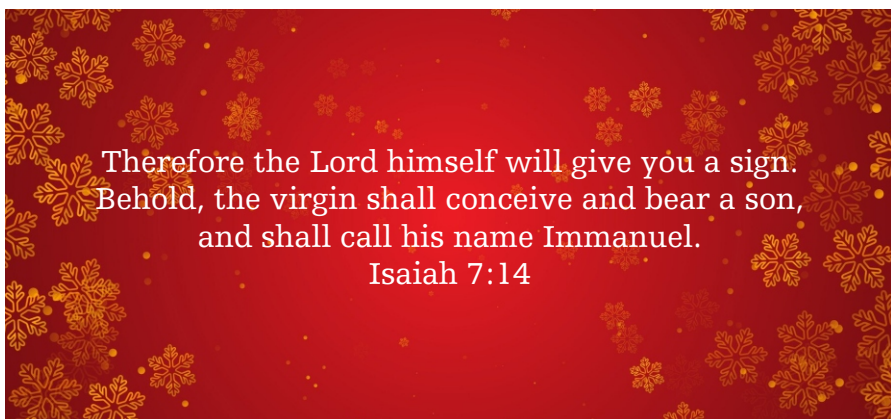
today is to be settled today. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. Today, we still have the option of choosing Jesus as our Lord and having His kingdom within our hearts. If we don't receive Him now, we will be entrenched in our opposition to Him and join the Antichrist in fighting Jesus.

Who is king in your life? It's an issue for Christmas.



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The Treasure in Christ, Not in Caste

Rev. Dr. Richard Howell

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-12



Introduction

The journey of the Wise Men, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, is a profound narrative of seeking, finding, and worshiping the true King. These men, learned and affluent, journeyed far from the East, following a star that signified the birth of a king. Yet, they did not find this king in a grand palace or seated on a throne of worldly power. Instead, they found Him in the most humble of settings—a manger in Bethlehem.

The Wise Men's journey is a lesson for us. They came seeking a treasure not of earthly riches or

power but of divine worth. Today, we find Jesus not in places of privilege but among those who suffer, those who are humble, and those who are marginalized. This truth calls us to reconsider what we value and where we seek our identity, especially in societies and churches where caste continues to be a source of division and oppression.

1. The Humble Setting of God's Glory

The Wise Men came expecting to find a king in a royal palace, yet they found Jesus in a humble manger (Matthew 2:1-11). They weren't disappointed because they had come to worship a



greater glory than earthly riches could contain. This moment challenges our assumptions about where true worth lies. Many times, we associate greatness with wealth, power, and status. But God often chooses the humble, the meek, and the lowly as places to reveal His presence and glory (1 Samuel 16:7; James 2:5; 1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

In the same way, God's glory today is found among those who are oppressed and marginalized. Jesus proclaimed that He came to bring good news to the poor and set the oppressed free (Luke 4:18-19). In a church setting where caste divides and subjugates, we must remember that Christ is not bound to the privileged. Instead, He dwells among those who suffer injustice and seek His mercy (Matthew 25:40; Isaiah 57:15). Just as the Wise Men had to look beyond appearances to see the true King, we, too, must look beyond caste and status to see Christ in one another (Galatians 3:28).

2. Christ's Treasure in Our Humanity, Not in Caste

The Wise Men brought treasures

to honor Christ: gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). These gifts, while valuable, symbolized something even greater—the true worth of Jesus. For us, Christ is the ultimate treasure, more valuable than any material wealth or social identity, including caste (Philippians 3:8; Colossians 2:3).

In societies where caste distinctions have deeply rooted social implications, this truth calls for a radical shift in perspective. The worth of an individual does not rest on their caste or social status but on their identity in Christ. As Paul writes in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Our true treasure is our unity in Christ, who makes us all equal participants in God's Kingdom (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:14-16).

To place our worth in caste, to see one another through the lens of social hierarchy, is to miss the treasure that Christ offers us. Instead, Jesus invites us to see each other as brothers and sisters (Matthew 23:8), to break



down walls of division, and to embrace the fullness of our identity in Him (John 13:34-35; Romans 12:10; James 2:1-4).

3. Jesus' Presence Among the Marginalized and Oppressed

Throughout His life, Jesus demonstrated a consistent pattern of choosing to be with those who were marginalized. He spoke with tax collectors (Matthew 9:10-13), healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-3), and welcomed the outcasts (Luke 5:12-13; Luke 15:1-2). Jesus' life was a testament to the truth that God is especially present among those who are looked down upon by society (Luke 4:18-19; Matthew 25:40). Today, in the context of caste discrimination, this is a powerful reminder.

Jesus' presence is among those who are subjugated and oppressed, not those who dominate or marginalize (James 2:5-6; Isaiah 57:15). In a church that claims to follow Christ, it is vital that we seek Him not among the elite or those with privileged status but among those whom society has placed at the margins (1 Corinthians 1:27-28; Luke

14:13-14). The real treasure, as the Wise Men discovered, is in Christ (Matthew 2:11). In the same way, the true worth of the church lies in its reflection of Christ's love and justice, not in preserving human-made divisions (Ephesians 2:14-16; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11).

4. The Call to Cast Down Caste Distinctions in the Church

The church, as the body of Christ, must embody His teachings by actively breaking down caste-based distinctions (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:28). If we are to reflect the Kingdom of God, we must embrace a community where every individual is valued equally as a beloved child of God (Ephesians 4:4-6; James 2:1-4). Caste-based discrimination in the church contradicts the very message of the Gospel, which is one of reconciliation, equality, and love (2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:11; Romans 12:10).

The Wise Men sought Jesus, and they were willing to look beyond appearances and expectations to find Him (Matthew 2:1-11). Are we willing to do the same? Can we, as a church, reject caste-



based identities and seek the true treasure in Christ? We must let go of our prejudices and social biases, allowing Christ's love to transform our hearts and our communities (Romans 12:2; 1 John 4:7-8; Ephesians 4:22-24).

5. Finding Christ Where He Chooses to Dwell

Finally, the Wise Men's journey reminds us that finding Christ requires humility and a willingness to go where He is (Micah 6:8; Matthew 2:1-12). In the church today, this means recognizing Christ among those who are subjugated by caste or treated as lesser (James 2:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:27-29). Jesus is not found in places of privilege; rather, He is among the marginalized, and His heart breaks for those who suffer oppression (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19).

In Matthew 25:40, Jesus tells us, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." To find Jesus, we must seek Him where He chooses to dwell, among those who are looked down upon, discriminated

against, and marginalized (Psalm 34:18; Proverbs 22:22-23; Isaiah 57:15).

Conclusion

As we reflect on the journey of the Wise Men, let us remember that true treasure is found in Christ, not in caste or status. The church must be a place where all are valued, loved, and caste distinctions are cast aside. We are called to seek Christ among the suffering and oppressed.

The Wise Men left their lands, wealth, and privilege to find the true King. Let us also leave behind social prejudices, embracing one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Only then will we find the treasure of Christ and fully reflect His Kingdom in our lives and church.

Action Steps for Embracing "The Treasure in Christ, Not in Caste"

- Foster Inclusive Worship and Community

Create church environments where every individual, regardless of social background or caste, feels valued and welcomed. Encourage fellowship activities that bring people



together from diverse backgrounds and emphasize unity in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

- Educate on Biblical Equality and Justice

Organize Bible studies and sermons focusing on Scriptures that affirm equality, justice, and love for one another. Teach against caste-based distinctions, highlighting how Christ's love calls us to unity and to treat each person with dignity and respect (James 2:1-4).

- Identify and Uplift the Marginalized in Your Community

Seek out and support those in your congregation and community who may feel marginalized or oppressed due to caste or social status. Encourage church leaders and members to engage with and uplift those who face discrimination, showing Christ's love through practical acts of service (Matthew 25:40).

- Build Awareness of Social Prejudices and Biases

Hold workshops or discussions to help church members identify

and challenge personal or cultural biases related to caste. Provide resources that encourage self-reflection and help individuals confront and overcome any social prejudices that may prevent genuine fellowship.

- Encourage Acts of Service and Solidarity

Develop outreach programs that serve marginalized communities, demonstrating that the church stands with those who suffer injustice. Volunteer efforts can include providing educational resources, health services, or legal assistance to those affected by caste-based discrimination (Micah 6:8).

- Create an Accountability Framework

Establish clear anti-discrimination policies within the church and set up an accountability team to address any complaints or issues related to caste discrimination. This creates a safe space for those affected to voice concerns and ensures that the church remains a place of unity and love.



- **Model Reconciliation and Unity in Leadership**

Ensure that church leadership represents a diversity of backgrounds and experiences. This helps to model reconciliation and inclusivity and shows the congregation that unity in Christ transcends caste or social divisions (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

- **Promote and Celebrate Stories of Unity**

Regularly share testimonies and stories from church members who have overcome caste-based challenges or experienced transformation through the love and unity found in Christ. These

testimonies can inspire and reinforce the church's commitment to casting down caste distinctions.



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Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.
When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph,
before they came together she was found
to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:18



Probably you have heard about the Wright Brothers who succeeded in inventing an airplane after doing so many experiments with prototype flying machines in the mountains of North Carolina. After they finally succeeded in their attempts to invent airplane big enough to let mankind fly, they sent a lovely telegraph to their dear mother at Dayton Ohio, saying, '**Men can fly, coming home for Christmas**' (Dec 1903) The overjoyed mother then told all her neighbours and friends that her sons are coming home at last for Christmas ! In her excitement, she however forgot to tell the **Greatest News on earth** about the invention of airplane made by her very own children!! Many of

us are like this dear old mother. We celebrate Christmas forgetting the central message of Christmas!

Christ or Christmas

Christmas is the celebration of the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem who was born about two thousand years ago. The original story is told in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Matthew narrated the birth of Jesus the Messiah as the king of the Jews as foretold by the prophets. Thus when he was born, he was honoured by the wise men from the East who saw his Star in the east and followed it to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem and when they saw Him, they worshipped Him with



costly gifts .(Mathew 2).Where as in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was visited by the lowly shepherds of Bethlehem who saw the Angelic hosts singing the most beautiful redemption song and told them to go and see the new born Saviour of mankind in Bethlehem. Sure enough, they saw a baby wrapped in a swaddling clothes lying in a manger as the Angel told them. The shepherds told Mary what the Angel said to them about the wonderful child. (Luke 2).When they saw the Saviour who came down to their own level, they were filled with joy and excitement. And all the people who heard their story were filled with joy and praised the God of Israel. That was the first Christmas in Bethlehem. How different it was from our present day colourful Christmas full of costly decorations and full of all kinds of Christmas songs! It often makes me wonder whether we celebrate Christmas rather than the ***Christ of Christmas!!***

Christmas with Mother Teresa

We all know Mother Teresa died on 5th Sept 1997 at her home in Kolkata, two days after her 87th birthday. That year all the streets

of Kolkata were filled with the decorated pictures and messages of Mother Teresa. After all she was their Mother. I met her in 1978 at her home and interviewed her and my brief interview was published in AIM magazine later. After two years, around Christmas time 1999, I went down to Kolkata to spend Christmas at the Mother Teresa Center on my way to **Baptist World Alliance AD 2000 Gathering at Melbourne**. I went to the feeding center as well where thousands of poor people lined up to get their portion their Christmas meal made of fried rice and two pieces of fried chicken. I saw the fried rice piling up so high being looked after by a few Brazilian and Mexican volunteers and one Indian lady who distributed to these poor beggars and homeless street people in a plastic bag. As I stood near the distribution centre there, enjoying the scene, one beggar came towards me with and joyfully hug me shouting with his plastic bag in the air 'Christmas Christmas'. Surely, that was Christmas for him!

When I returned back to Shillong



after sometime, I shared this experience at the Pastors' Prayer breakfast. The next year, one Pastor arranged Christmas feast for the Tibetan Refugees in Shillong. It was perhaps the greatest Christmas for this neglected Community to see for the first time Christians showing love to them through this Christmas community feast.

The AG Church in Kolkata has a tradition of running **Songs of the Season** every Christmas time, when they invited well-known singers to attract outside people to hear the Gospel message. Christ came to share His love to the world on Christmas day. Perhaps, we can do more to show the spirit of Christmas if we have more programs for those who are outside the Church. Make Christmas, a blessing for others.

The famous Christmas Carol Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens made up of five stages never lost its charm and interests till to date, as every year this meaningful drama would be staged by some artists one way or the other. Mr. Scrooge, the main character is a rich man who

had no time for the family or the community as all his time was devoted to minting money for himself. Christmas Carol is a story of rebirth. Scrooge was visited by 3 Spirits who helped him discover a new mindset about Christmas and more importantly about life. At the end of the day, Scrooge regained his ability to laugh and experience joy again. Scrooge surprised his apprentice with his transformation and a promise to help him and his family. So, everyone has a **Merrier Christmas!**

Perhaps like Mr Scrooge all of us need transformation about how we celebrate our Christmas or even about life. I never forget two Japanese guys I met in Tezpur Assam, a long time ago. The older of the two, Toya Tome told me how he used to spend Christmas back at home. He lives in Los Angeles, a city of what we may call world class entertainment city. When Christmas time came, unlike others he would be home waiting for calls to come from desperate people who would need help in a 'right now' situation. He would put his phone number and address



out on the local TV and newspapers saying he is available to help those who are in need. He told me how so many times he was able to help those who are in great distress, some of them about to commit suicide. He could do that because he was willing to forgo everything, including his sleep to make himself available for others. What a great example of love to spend Christmas that way!

The Prince of Peace's real life story

When the heavenly host announced the coming of Jesus to the group of poor shepherds of Bethlehem through their first ever Christmas Carol (Luke 2:13-14), they proclaimed that the mission of Jesus, the newborn Saviour in Bethlehem, would be to bring 'Peace on Earth' because He is called the 'Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9:7)

Think about this. Don Richardson and his wife Carol went to Sawi People in Western New Guinea (Indonesia) in 1962 and were able to communicate with them that God loves them and that He sent Jesus 'the Peace Child' of God by using the cultural context

of the Sawi People. The Sawi warring villages would make peace only by exchanging suckling baby from both warring villages. As long as this '**peace child**' lives, there can be no war between them. Don Richardson then said Jesus in the 'Peace Child of God' for mankind. These people are literally cannibals who killed people of their choice and eat them including missionaries who came there earlier. I met Don at Fuller Seminary when he came with his world famous '**Peace Child**' book (Autographed I for me) and shared with us his mission experience among the Sawi people (1976). Half of the population had accepted Jesus Christ then and when he revisited the island with his three sons after 50 years, he baptized another 250 people again. What a great **incarnational story!**

Where is the King of the Jews?

We are all familiar with the three wise men and the guiding Star of Bethlehem they followed. When the wise men came to Jerusalem to worship the newborn king of the Jews, they asked '**where is the King of the Jews?**' which surprised everyone, especially



King Herod! The Bible long time ago announced that “A star is coming out of Jacob, a scepter is coming out of Israel” (Num 24:17). Marvelous prophecy made long time ago became alive. ‘There must be some hidden plan about the star’ Herod thought! Herod and the people of Jerusalem were greatly disturbed according to the Bible. Herod then called the scribes to enquire about the prophecy of the new king of the Jews. He further called the wise men and enquired about the Star they saw in the East?

They soon declared that prophet Micah had already said, Jesus the ruler of Israel would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Clear enough! So, the Wise Men moved to Bethlehem. These wise men came to worship the new baby in the king’s palace full of delicacies, music and entertainment because Herod loves such things. **But alas! Jesus was not found in Herod’s palace!** No one including the king Herod and all his dignitaries there were ready to leave that palace of worldly pleasures and go to Bethlehem to see the newborn King Jesus!

There was however a story of a little boy who followed the wise men to Bethlehem to worship the new king. This little drummer boy as the story goes asked Mary to allow him to play his drum for Jesus and so, happily he danced and sang with his drum in honour of the king. To this day, his song of the Drummer Boy would be heard every Christmas around the world because he was so excited to see the new born king Jesus in that lonesome Bethlehem! Are we excited like him **to see and worship Jesus this Christmas?** Will Christ be the king of our Christmas celebrations?

In history, we noted that there are six Herods related Jesus and His disciples. All of them were either removed or died ingloriously because they were on the wrong side of the fence, so to say. They were known for their violence and evil sexual character and hence they ruled only for a short time. The Herod who killed all the babies in and around Bethlehem did not live very long. All the Herods according to history, wanted to be popular, but were removed shortly after they came to power. One Herod was killed by



an angel while addressing a big crowd in Caesarea because he did not give glory to God. After his death, the Bible says, **'the word of God spread everywhere'** (Acts 12:24). Amazing!!

The newborn baby the wise men worshipped became a great miracle worker and healed so many of their diseases and raised up even dead people. But he was crucified by those who hated him but rose again on the third day as foretold. He appeared to so many after his resurrection and his disciples being empowered by the Holy Spirit, continued the good works of preaching, healing and transforming thousands in the name of Jesus. So, the Gospel travelled from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, to the Greeks and to all the Roman Empire within no time, until the Roman Emperor Claudius declared Christianity the State religion of the whole Roman Empire. This shows the power of Jesus Christ.

We are told, a time is coming when **"The kingdom of this**

world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever" Revelation 11:15.

So let us honour our King and Lord this Christmas with this chorus.

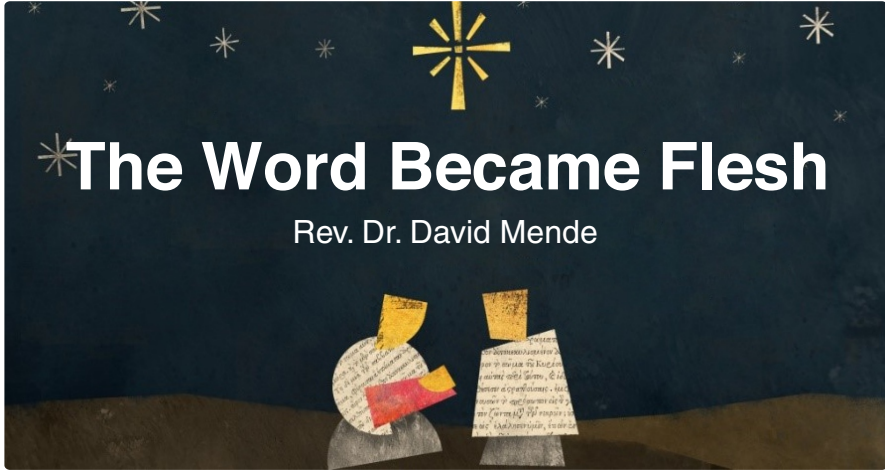
**He is Lord, He is Lord
He has risen from the dead and
He is Lord
Every Knee shall bow
Every tongue Confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord!
(Phil 2:5-11)**



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And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.
Luke 2:20



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 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 was 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 fulfillment 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 fulfillment 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 on 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 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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And this is the testimony,
that God gave us eternal life,
and this life is in his Son.
1 John 1:15



Thoughts at Advent

Dr Shantanu Dutta

In 2024, the world finds itself again in uncertainty and conflict. From the ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East to the rising tensions between China and Taiwan, from the climate crisis to the economic fallout of the pandemic, the spectre of darkness looms large over the horizon. As we approach the season of Christmas, a time traditionally associated with hope, joy, and peace, it is more important than ever to reflect on the theological significance of this occasion.

The nativity story itself is one of hope emerging from humble, uncertain beginnings. Jesus was born in a stable, a setting far removed from grandeur, symbolising accessibility to all,

especially those in dire situations. This is particularly poignant in today's world, where many are seeking hope amid crises like climate change, pandemics, and political unrest.

Christmas reminds us of the reality of God becoming flesh and coming to dwell among us. At the heart of the Christmas story lies the doctrine of the Incarnation, the belief that God became human in the person of Jesus Christ. This is not a mere theological abstraction but a profound reality that has implications for our understanding of both God and humanity.

This act of divine humility and closeness to human suffering is a



profound comfort. It suggests that in our darkest times, divinity is not distant but intimately involved in the human experience. This perspective offers solace, suggesting that we are not alone in our struggles; the divine presence walks with us, sharing in our pains and joys.

In his seminal work, "The Nature and Destiny of Man," Reinhold Niebuhr writes that "man's capacity for good contains within it also the capacity for evil". This is a truth that has been tragically evident throughout human history, from the atrocities of war to the injustices of oppression. Against this backdrop of human frailty and darkness, the Incarnation stands as a beacon of hope. By taking on human form, God enters into our world, not as a distant observer, but as an active participant in our struggles and suffering.

As told in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the Christmas narrative unfolds within a context that resonates with today's challenges. Mary and Joseph face tumultuous circumstances, including political oppression under Roman rule, societal

judgment regarding their situation, and the perilous journey to Bethlehem. The birth of Jesus occurs not in comfort but in a barn, surrounded by the stark realities of life. In reflecting on the nativity, we recognize that the incarnation of Christ emerged in an environment disturbed by uncertainty—the very conditions we are experiencing today.

The message of hope is at the core of the Christmas celebration. In Isaiah 9:2, the prophecy of a coming Messiah is heralded: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light." This proclamation resonates with us amid the uncertainties of 2023. For many, the darkness feels overwhelming—whether due to geopolitical tensions, widespread social injustice, or the existential threat of climate change. Yet, Christmas invites us to reflect on the light that breaks through this darkness.

In the Gospel of Luke, the angels proclaimed at Jesus' birth, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14). This peace, however, is not the absence of



conflict but the presence of God's reconciling love. The angel Gabriel tells Mary, "He will be called Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:23). The birth of Jesus is not just the birth of another child but the arrival of God's presence in the world.

This presence is a source of profound joy, not a fleeting emotion but an abiding reality. The writer of the Gospel of John tells us that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have beheld his glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

As we reflect on this story in the context of our world, we are struck by how the themes of hope, peace, and redemption are still relevant today. In a world where conflict and violence seem to be on the rise, where economic inequality and social injustice are rampant, we need to hear the message of Christmas more than ever. We need to be reminded that God is with us, that God is for us, and that God is working to bring about a world of peace and justice.

Amid uncertainty and volatility, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and powerless. We may feel that our lives and actions are insignificant in the face of such massive problems. Yet, the Christmas story reminds us that even the smallest actions can have a profound impact. The shepherds, who were among the most marginalised members of society, were able to spread the news of Jesus' birth to others, creating a ripple effect of hope and joy that continues to this day. The shepherds, who were the first to hear the news of Jesus' birth, were not alone. They were part of a community, a community that was bound together by shared experiences, shared struggles, and shared hopes. In a world where individualism and isolation are increasingly prevalent, the Christmas story reminds us of the importance of building strong, supportive communities that are grounded in love, compassion, and mutual respect.

Christmas is inherently a collective experience. The nativity story emphasises that the shepherds, the wise men, and even the angels play crucial roles



in the recognition of Jesus' birth. The communal aspect of Christmas brings to light the importance of togetherness and shared responsibility in addressing the uncertainties we face.

The Christmas message calls the Church to be a beacon of hope and a source of comfort in the face of suffering. It calls the Church to embody the love and compassion of Christ in its actions and interactions with the world. This means extending a hand of solidarity to those suffering from conflict, displacement, and poverty. It means advocating for policies that promote peace and justice. It means challenging systems of oppression and inequality. It means fostering dialogue and understanding across cultural and religious divides. In short, it means living out the Gospel amid

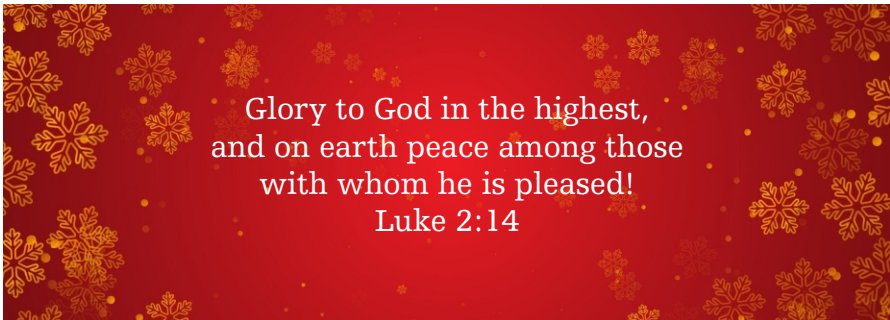
a world that desperately needs its light.

May the light of the Christ child illuminate our hearts and guide our actions, leading us towards a world where peace and justice prevail, a world where the promise of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" becomes a tangible reality.



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What Happens When Believers Die? What Happens When Unbelievers Die?

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

Death is perhaps the most common of all human experiences. The Ecclesiastes pen-man wrote, 'No one can master the wind and contain it—it blows as it will. No one has power over the day of death—it comes as it will' (Eccl. 8:8, VOICE). The writer to the Hebrews wrote thus: '[Therefore] Since these children are people with physical bodies [have in common their flesh and blood], Jesus himself became like them [shared their humanity; likewise shared the same things]. He did this so that, by dying, he could destroy the one who has the power of death—the devil—' (Heb. 2:14, EXB). One major way that Jesus became like each one of us humans was via his death. But remained Jesus remained

100% God even as he died. God cannot die, generally speaking. But God can choose to die. That's what Jesus did. He chose to die. He said, 'No one takes my life from me. I give it up willingly! I have the power to give it up and the power to receive it back again, just as my Father commanded me to do' (John 10:18, CEV).

What happens when an unbeliever dies? The real story that Jesus narrated in Luke 16 has the answer. The Rich man who died was certainly not a believer. Where did he go? Hear it from the mouth of Jesus: 'and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side' (Luke 16:23, ESV). Yes, he went to a



place called Hades. He was already in torment the moment he landed there after his death. But then there will come a day when all the occupants of Hades will go to a place called Lake of Fire after the return of Jesus. In Revelation 19, we read of Jesus' public return. In Revelation 20, we read of the Great White Throne judgement which Jesus will preside over after his return. In that account is this verse which few take time to understand: 'Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire' (Rev. 20:14, ESV). I believe this means that all who have died and have gone to Hades will now be transferred without any exit options to the Lake of Fire. And in the Lake of Fire they would burn forever. I did not say this. The Bible says this. John wrote, 'The devil who deceived them, was thrown into the fiery lake of sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were also thrown. They will be tortured day and night forever and ever' (Rev. 20:10, GW). Revelation 14:9-11 also says the same thing: And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If

anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name" (ESV). The phrase receiving the mark of the beast on your forehead or hand is symbolic. Revelation 1:20 says this: 'As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches' (ESV). Right at the start of the book of Revelation, we are told this in-effect (my understanding): 'Interpret the word pictures of Revelation in the light of what is clearly revealed in the Bible in the first 65 books of the Bible!' So when Revelation 1 talks about seven lampstands, they are not literal lampstands,



but seven churches who have to be like a lampstand, shining the light of Jesus in the dark world! In the same way, those receiving the beast's mark in the hand and head would mean those who follow Satanic forces surrendering their thoughts (head) and actions (hand) to him! These are the people who will go to hell also called the lake of fire!

What happens when a believer dies? He goes to Paradise that very second. That is what Jesus told the repentant dying thief who also believed in him: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43, ESV). Why do I say he was repentant? Why do I say he had faith? Rewind a little bit and read Luke 23: 'One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom"

(v.39-42, ESV). While one of the criminals hanging on the Cross mocked Jesus, this Paradise-headed criminal acknowledged that he had committed sins that merited punishment. Not only that – he acknowledged Jesus, who was hanging on a cross branded as a criminal – as the King. This took a lot of faith. Even though Jesus did not look like a King as he hung on the Cross, he saw Jesus as a King. That constituted saving faith. Yes, when we repent from sin and believe in Jesus, we will enter Paradise the second we die!

Life in paradise is called being with the Lord as I understand from the words of Apostle Paul. He had a dilemma: 'If I continue living here on earth, I will be able to work for the Lord. But what would I choose—to live or to die? I don't know' (Phil. 1:22, ERV). But he chose the latter option: 'I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better' (Phil. 1:23, ESV). Paul indicated here, the moment a believer dies he will be with Christ (that is the paradise life, I suppose).



But a believer does not go on living in paradise. The believer eventually gets moved to New Heaven and New Earth after the public return of Jesus. Jesus returns in Revelation 19. Day of Judgement happens in Revelation 20. And from Revelation 21, we have the unveiling of the New Heaven and New Earth. John writes about this: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more' (Rev. 21:1). Perhaps this is the place Jesus is currently preparing for us. Remember his words? "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going" (John 14:1-4 ESV).

Just as the Bible says there will be endless torment for those in Hades now and those headed for lake of Fire later, the Bible also

says there will be sweet relief for those in paradise now and those headed for the New Heaven and New Earth! Revelation 7:13-17 perhaps talks about the pain-free, tears-free life in paradise for believers (in this case, martyrs for Jesus). And even in the New Heaven and New Earth there will be no pain and no tears: 'He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away' (Rev. 21:4, ESV). That means, till we reach either Paradise of New Heaven and New Earth thereafter, we as believers will face mourning, crying and pain! So, let us not believe any false teacher who tells us that life on this earth will be pain-free and tears-free!

In the New Heaven and New Earth, we will be sin-free as well. Listen to the words of John: 'But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life' (Rev. 21:27). Till we reach there, we as believers may 'stumble in many ways' (James



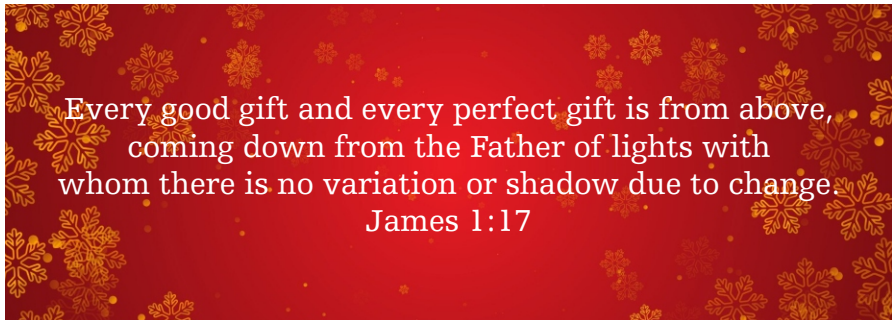
3:2). And 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 John 1:8). But that does not mean we play with sin while on earth. Absolutely not. Rather we fight sin enabled by the Holy Spirit. Recall these words of Apostle Paul: 'For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live' (Rom. 8:13)! We are called to put to death sin, not play with sin while we are here! Peter seconded this. He wrote, 'Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul' (1 Peter 2:11).

Having understood in brief what the Bible says about what happens to those who die let us move forward in our pilgrim life, purposefully!



Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

is the founder of Grabbing the Google Generation from Gehenna Mission. He is the author of four books, latest being, Hyper Biblical, a passionate treatise on modern day false teaching. His book, Straight Talk, is seen as a reliable resource on sex, love, marriage, porn, phone addiction and the like. His YouTube channel, Duke Jeyaraj, has over 2000 videos. He lives in Chennai with his wife, Evangelin, and children, Dale and Datasha, and has travelled by invitation to over 20 Indian states and to 7 nations after having started out to preach as a 16-year-old school boy in 1991. Reach Duke via WhatsApp at 918886040605





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Intercessory Prayer Points



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1 SUNDAY Thank God for enabling us to see the last month of this year. Praise Him for His goodness. Thank God for all the works that you have done by His enablement.

2 MONDAY Pray for Christian Institute of Management at Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Pray that they may train and equip Churches and organizations in India to achieve management excellence to fulfil their God given vision and mission.

3 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.

4 WEDNESDAY Pray for the ministry of Evangelical Fellowship of India. Pray that God would give new vision and new direction for the coming years. Thank God for using EFI as His instrument to accomplish His plans and purposes.

5 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.

6 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.

7 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.

8 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.

9 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.

10 TUESDAY 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.

11 WEDNESDAY 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.

12 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.

13 FRIDAY Pray for all the Christmas programs organized in different parts of the country today. Pray for meaningful, joyful, and peaceful Christmas as we celebrate Christ's birth. Pray that we may have humble hearts to receive Jesus into our hearts.

14 SATURDAY 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.

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

16 MONDAY 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.

17 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.

18 WEDNESDAY 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.

19 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.

20 FRIDAY 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.

21 SATURDAY 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.

22 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. Pray also that His kingdom would be extended far and wide for God's glory.

23 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.

24 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.

25 WEDNESDAY As the world celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ today, pray that God's peace would envelope the whole world. Thank Jesus for laying down His heavenly

glory and taking human form to be with you and me.

26 THURSDAY Pray for Little Flock Fellowship, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Pray that the church may courageously share Christmas message to those who have not heard about Christ.

27 FRIDAY Continue to pray for the ministry of Evangelical Fellowship of India. Pray for God's provision for works that He has called us to do.

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

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

30 MONDAY 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.

31 TUESDAY Thank God for the year of 2024. Pray that His presence will go with you to the new year 2025.



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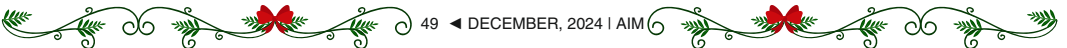
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