

S Jeeu[♥]tsau!

To Celebrate Life!



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Christmas 2020 – a Life Giving Event

Every Christmas, we celebrate that very fragile life of our God who is born, the Divine takes on human flesh, made incarnate in that little beginning of life in Mary's womb. Since God is all-powerful, he could have chosen to come to this earth as a fully grown-up human being. But he chose to become part of the human race starting from life at its inception. Life in its fragile and delicate form is precisely the concern of AHLC, the Archdiocesan Human Life Commission. AHLC is concerned about this life precisely because life at this stage cannot defend itself from world powers that value its own comforts and good pleasures. Without any hesitation these powers of the world will go to any lengths to eliminate innocent life. The Lord Jesus who came into the world also had to face the challenges of evil powerful forces of kings who felt threatened of their own positions in society and annihilated victims of innocent life. We read about this massacre of innocent life in the Gospel of St Mathew. Thanks to the care of the parents of Jesus who made that tedious journey into Egypt to defend that innocent life of Jesus. (Mt 2:1-6).

As we celebrate Christmas, let us celebrate the contribution of so many people, like Joseph and Mary who work to defend life in its very delicate beginnings. May these numbers of defenders of life keep growing and may their hands be strengthened by our God who is Emmanuel, God-with-us. The power of God is always available for people who are working for gospel values and for a purpose higher than themselves.

May our celebration of Christmas in the midst of this pandemic help us to sit back and chose life and all that is life-giving! In normal times, Christmas brings with it many joyful sentiments, spending time decorating our homes and making goodies but probably this Christmas, with social distancing, we will have more time to sit back and choose the higher values for which Christ stood.

If we do not defend that life at its inception, similar to the innocent life of the Baby Jesus, there may be no Jesus, and no humanity to celebrate.

Wishing all health care workers and others who refuse live by the values of the world and stand and defend the innocent life of the unborn! May Jesus's birth support us in our defence of innocent life!

Happy Christmas, may the new born child Jesus be a blessing in our lives and bless every home!



Welcome Jesus

By Ninette Lobo

How we all await that time of the year with bated breath as we anticipate all the merriment and festivities which go with making Christmas so joyous and special for all of us. Starting with the Midnight Service in Church when we all troop in dressed in our finery followed by the day's celebrations of merry making, carols, exchanging gifts, and the culinary and gastronomic delights which await us, not forgetting the decor with which we illuminate our homes with Christmas trees and wreaths, the list is endless and the celebrations go on till after Christmas right into the New Year.

There is a lot of confusion about Christmas. Is it a day? Is it a season? Is it based on a pagan holiday? What is its real meaning?

Although many voices suggest that the true essence of Christmas is being kind to each other or being with our families. The real meaning of the day – and the season is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Much as we look forward to this festival and celebrate it with such joy and preparation, it leaves one feeling hollow and empty. If this is all it takes to make Christmas a festival worth celebrating then why are we left feeling that there is something amiss. Yes of course we have forgotten the true essence of Christmas, the very pivot around which all these celebrations revolve. The Christ in Christmas appears to have been forgotten in this whirlwind. (CCC524) When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for His second coming (200) by celebrating the precursor's birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to His desire: He must increase, but I must decrease". (201).

So how do we truly welcome Jesus at Christmas? First, we start with the Advent wreath. The wreath is a circle which has no beginning or end: God is eternal, and His love for us is everlasting. The wreath is made of fresh plant material because Christ came to give us new everlasting life through His passion death and resurrection. The 3 purple candles signify penance, preparation and sacrifice, the pink candle signifies the same but highlights the third Sunday of Advent when we rejoice that our preparation is half finished and Christ will come soon. The light represents Christ who entered this world to scatter the darkness of evil and show us the way of righteousness. Lighting the candles show our readiness to meet Our Lord.

Second, we must pray. Hopefully prayer is already a part of our routine but if not make it one.

Third read sacred Scripture. Do not just read the Gospel passages rather spend a few minutes reflecting on it.

Fourth, take the time for confession. Do a thorough examination of conscience. Pray for help from the Holy Spirit write down those sins that come to mind.

Fifth teach the children especially, read to them the stories of the religious significance of Christmas.

Sixth preach. There subtle ways to preach Christmas: e.g., we greet people by saying Merry Christmas not Happy Holidays. We tell those who don't know much, about the birth of a Savior.

At social gatherings preach by actions. At Christmas parties topics of religion and politics inevitably emerge with some making derogatory remarks against the faith. Defend the faith with love and not aggressively.

Finally, do-good works each day which lead up to Christmas.

So, prepare this Advent to receive Christ as though He were coming for the first time. Make this Christmas a celebration of the birth of Our Savior and the great gift of faith we have received. By striving to live in the presence of Christ during Advent, we will receive the best present of all - Our Savior.

This year has been one that was not foreseen by anyone and has created a pallor gloom all over the globe, one that the world is still struggling to come to terms with and one that has left in its wake so many sick, dead and jobless. Yes, the Coronavirus Pandemic has wreaked havoc on a world which we thought to be secure, by creating a God out of materialism. This Pandemic has been an eye opener that the one true God exists and it is in Him that we need to place all our hope and trust. Let us make this Christmas truly a memorable one by welcoming that one true God Jesus Christ into our hearts, our families and our homes and thus keeping the true spirit of Christmas alive.

*A few excerpts – courtesy: Catholic Answers and CCC

Ninette Lobo is the Director of the Archdiocesan Human Life Committee, Archdiocese of Bombay



Jesus – the Centerpiece of Christmas

Dr Jeanette Pinto

Christmas is celebrated the world over to remember the birth of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the Son of God, and the Saviour of all mankind. What is a centerpiece?

Well a centerpiece is an important item of a display or table setting. It creates a theme for decoration and is an important object in a collection of items. Since Christmas is our focus now, how do we put Jesus in the center of Christmas? Let's explore some ways to do it in Covid times.

Firstly, engage in the Advent traditions of preparations, like tidying the home and hearth to welcome Jesus. Get out your Art and Craft supplies to make Jesus centered Christmas cards. Think of inviting to your Christmas dinner, guests who don't have family like an orphan, a disabled child or a lonely widow. Make your invitations with a picture of baby Jesus. Listen and enjoy Christmas songs and carols.

Make a pretty cardboard name plate and write in a decorative hand, the name JESUS, and place it on your door. All your visitors during the season will be excited to think that they are visiting the home of Jesus. Children could make visiting cards with 'JESUS LOVES YOU', and these could be freely distributed to all in the neighbourhood during the season of Christmas.

Create an environment friendly crib using fresh sprouted greens, fresh flowers toy animals, paper or cardboard cut outs and bring the story of Jesus birth to life. Can you imagine a nativity scene without the figure of baby Jesus? Display your crib in a prominent location of the house. Remember Jesus is your shining Star. Families of a Housing Complex could make a joint outdoor crib where neighbours and passersby can view and see baby Jesus.

As a family, adopt a needy child or family at Christmas. Not only shop for their physical wants, but also give them spiritual helps such as models of baby Jesus, a Bible or a picture book with Christian themes. Pray for them throughout the season, for their salvation, spiritual growth, and that they will look to God to meet their needs. Presently maybe different families could volunteer to send to a Home for children in the neighbourhood, cookies or sweet delights for evening tea on different days during the season.

Give birthday gifts to Jesus. Birthday gifts are much sought after by children, so what would you gift baby Jesus? Wrap a box in colorful tissue and cut a slit in the lid. Fill a container with blank slips of paper and put it by the box. Family members could write what gift they would like to give Jesus, describe the gift, and put the slip in the box – perhaps without names. Open the box on Christmas day and see what presents the family members have given Jesus for His birthday.

Giving is better than receiving - it brings happiness to everyone's life. The slum children who sell cheap stuff on footpaths do not know true happiness due to their abject poverty. They know not what Christmas is, they only know of Santa who brings gifts - they don't know Jesus! Have a party, give them goodies, toys, or clothes. Dispel their darkness by telling them the beautiful story of the birth of Jesus. How about a Community preparing

and giving their helpers a hamper of goodies? Don't forget to tell them about the reason, - Jesus' birthday! So, you see you can have fun and enjoy the season by making Jesus the centerpiece of Christmas.

In Covid times you have to think of out of the box ways to touch the lives of people who are under various restrictions. What about making a video of the crib and putting together carols sung by the community members, which tell of Jesus' birth, and of He being Saviour of the Universe. Send the video to a Home for disabled children or a Senior's Home or even to a prison to cheer the inmates. Jesus surely then will be the Centerpiece of the Christmas season.

Dr Jeanette is an Educator, the former Director and presently member of the Archdiocesan Human Life Committee.



O Holy Night

Sr. Maria Rohini



Yes! with the birth of Jesus, the night was indeed HOLY !!

No place for the baby? No arrangements for the Mother to deliver the baby?

In a new place as migrants! Where would Joseph find a job? How would they look after their newborn baby?

No relatives around!! AND you call it holy??

Yes, it was holy because the child who was born would bring out the meaning of WHOLENESS which is the root word for holiness and health and well being.

This Christmas with the lockdown how does one get it right still? or shall we change the theme of this CHRISTMAS?

Shall we sing other songs and hymns and leave this one out

Why has the virus spoilt our CHRISTMAS?

Let us ask this question to Mary and Joseph. Remain in Silence for some time... and find your answer.

Maybe they will tell us that the CENSUS did not prevent them from FAITH in this situation. We believed that our Son was the Son of God.

So then, what do I believe in? WHO do I believe in?

We will have no parties (I hope) because we don't want an increase in COVID cases after Christmas. Jesus came to give Health and wholeness.

Maybe no Christmas tree to pick up the virus from the air and spread it to all around. Mary and Joseph did not have one and the good news is they did not need it.

No Santa Claus or he will need to wash that red outfit after every round or he will carry the virus from one neighbour hood to the other! Just become aware of your gifts within...

So, what do we not need this Christmas? Let us as a family look at the essentials for the celebration of Christmas this year so that we have all that the Presence of Jesus is.

Maybe the SCCs could have Google calls for its members and find ways to make it a celebration.

RECONCILIATION could make our Christmas HOLY.

What can we do to bring Wholeness? Holiness to all we meet?

Is there someone who needs a job? Is there someone who needs food? What about others basic needs? Can you tell someone about the many food fridges in our city?

See the Christ child in swaddling clothes? See Mary and Joseph living in Faith.

Is someone ill in the neighbourhood? What can I do about it? Can I take them to the Parish clinic? Can I open my heart to the needy around me?

What about wholeness in me? Can I learn at every level to care for my health, update myself professionally, become more aware of my feelings and understand myself and finally how do I give myself time to recognize GOD in me so that such awareness is born in ME then that is a HOLY NIGHT!!!

HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

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No Shopping this CHRISTMAS...?



Suzette June Titus

What does Christmas mean to us...?

Is Christmas all about fun, shopping and enjoyment? Christmas comes and goes every year, the festival is celebrated by everyone not always spiritually but often in a materialistic way.

Jesus came on this earth to bring Salvation to all mankind and to be born in our hearts. We did not choose Him but He chose us. Jesus is Emmanuel and is God's best gift to us - Gift of Grace and righteousness.

What birthday gift can we offer Jesus? We need to offer Jesus a Gift of Thanksgiving, praise, worship and service, remembering the poor and needy, reaching out to the underprivileged, distressed and voiceless. Lets focus on making our talk match our walk, thus revealing our love for Jesus. Christmas is all about having a relationship with Jesus Christ.

What is Christmas for those who don't know Christ personally?

It's only a ritualistic annual celebration, featuring cakes, balloons, stars, dancing, dining, shopping, fun, merriment, Santa Claus, and a display of colorful lights. Carol singing, distribution of sweets, commercial marketing, buying, selling, making money from public and civic activities, eventually turning Christmas into a domestic affair. The festivity revolves around a children-centric holiday, marked by extravagant gift-giving and, in time, commercial-oriented activities.

Most often the 'birthday boy' is forgotten.! That is taking Christ out of Christmas. Indeed, Christmas is more than external shopping, fun and celebrations. We need to work on the true meaning of Christmas. How can I be a blessing to those in need or underprivileged? Most of the time we buy things that are not really needed, it's sort of a festive compulsion that we have adopted. Why can't we do something different, something out of the box...?

Christmas really is all about giving. We have an opportunity only here on earth to be a blessing to those who don't have the essentials of life... in heaven there's no one who would lack anything so do what we are required to do here itself. We are blessed; be a blessing to others. We are all gifted, talented and live comfortably in different ways. Jesus is the 'Reason' for the Season. Christmas is a time of joy and happiness, let's rejoice at Jesus' birth and see how we can experience Jesus being born in our present situation.

Jesus chose to be born in an animal shed for our redemption. Let us humble ourselves, forget our worldly pleasures which don't last and let us put Christ back into Christmas; enjoy in good conscience all that is good about Christmas.

During this pandemic many have experienced the presence of God more closely, many have repented and realised their faults and failures. This slowdown has been a good time for reflection and a good time to adopt lasting human values...be kind, forgiving, charitable, loving and make Christmas a pleasant time. There's no need to be shopping this Christmas.

Suzette Titus is a member of the Archdiocesan Human Life Committee, Archdiocese of Bombay



A Trendy Home Crib

Lisette Fernandes

In America it's called a nativity scene, in France a crèche, Spanish speaking people call it Nascimento de Cristo, Italians say Presepe de Natal. Closer home, in Konkani the Goans and Mangaloreans call it ghotto. In Marathi it is khrismas gharkul, and in Bombay, because we are like that only, we just call it a crib...

Growing up, I remember every Catholic house had one and so did every Church. Parishes often held crib competitions and youngsters started planning early - growing wheat or collecting hay to give the crib a natural feel. Forgot to grow wheat in time? No problem, mustard seeds sprouted really quick! Lots of local jugaad made each crib a masterpiece. Crumpled brown paper covered with mud for mountains, a piece of mirror turned into a small pond for the animals to drink water from, a tiny bulb covered with red and yellow cellophane paper became a bonfire for the shepherds to keep themselves warm. Baby Jesus was usually placed in his straw bed only after the family returned from midnight Mass. The statues of the three kings were moved a little everyday so that they reached the manger only on 6th January - the feast of the Epiphany.

In our Catholic colony, we've had some Avant Garde cribs including one placing the holy family in the slums near highways under construction with the poor and marginalized labourers. We've put our crib in the middle of the word JOY to proclaim what Jesus gave the world with His birth.

In years gone by, I used to try and make my crib at home a little different every year. One year I stacked up empty boxes wrapped as gifts with the crib placed in the central gift box. Another year the gift box became a Christmas bonbon. Both these depicted Jesus as the

real Christmas gift. Before recycling became a byword, I reused a cane house that was part of a bouquet to accommodate Jesus and his parents. I've placed the crib in different settings - in sand and cacti, in lush wheat greens and even in cotton snow.

A few years ago, the arrival of a fancy crib set threw creativity out of the window. The figurines were so beautifully crafted, the stand had candle holders, it needed nothing else. This year the lockdown has given us time to ponder over how we celebrate and I'm thinking about a crib appropriate for these Covid times, where shepherds and kings socially distance themselves from the new born baby but pay him true homage in their hearts.

In 1223, 797 years ago, Saint Francis of Assisi created the first nativity scene in Italy. It may have been an attempt to tell the story of the birth of Christ to those who could not read. Today, it is an attempt to put Christ back in Christmas rather than in the sweet-making, house-decorating, gift-giving, party-going charade it has become.

This Christmas, don't crib about making !

The Ever - Widening Circle of Peace

Genevieve Martins



"Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me"... So goes the refrain of a popular hymn. And yet so true and relevant to our time today. As political analysts have pointed out, the world is on the brink of World War III with countries fighting with each other and communal disharmony happening in our very own backyard. The world is torn by division and faction and no country is willing to extend the olive branch. Is it so difficult to find peace? Men have gone to the moon, there have been so many technological breakthroughs and we have been able to achieve the impossible. Yet the very thing that is the elixir of life is missing. There is no peace in the world today.

Come Christmas and we all look forward to the festival with an expectancy of gifts, good cheer and bonhomie. Is it going to be different this year? Yes, definitely the pandemic and the uncertainty surrounding us has made us think differently. Today, more than ever I want to experience peace and good will for all of God's creation. As the shepherds who came to worship Jesus heard the Biblical announcement - "Peace to people on earth, and good will to all men".

As a child I was often taken for the Wednesday novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Church. At this time, I was very intrigued by the many petitions for "peace of mind". The

number was staggeringly high. I couldn't understand why people were pleading with our Lady to give them peace of mind. I found it quite weird. Peace of mind should come naturally I believed. But today I realize its significance. Take from me anything you wish but give me peace. Therefore, my dear friends I would not trade this treasure for anything in the world.

Hence, how do we begin to nurture this peace? Right at the onset, since peace comes from God, we must open our hearts to receive this peace. As Christ has rightly said, "My peace I leave with you....my peace I give you". This peace that we receive from our Heavenly Father has a vertical dimension. Our personal experience of being at peace with God. This peace permeates every fibre of our being helping us to be better individuals. Once we experience peace within ourselves, we can then radiate this peace to others. We move on to the horizontal level where we give this peace to others. At the end of the Mass, the priest says, "Go in the peace of the Lord". So, this salvific mission of Christ is manifested through the cross wherein we receive peace from God and radiate it to others, starting with our family and extending it to our friends, neighbourhood, communities and society at large. This will lead to an ever-widening circle of peace - a whirlpool effect with ripples radiating all around.

Once peace is established goodwill will follow. Everyone will live in harmony with each other and the world will definitely be a better place. This is the best gift we can ask for, this Christmas so that our 2021 will be a year filled with love, selflessness, other centeredness and the viruses of hatred, injustice and selfishness will be a thing of the past.

*The Archdiocesan Human Life Committee Wishes you a Very Happy Christmas
and a Healthy, Bright and Lively 2021 !!*

