

We wish our Messenger Family
a Very Happy Peaceful and Prosperous New Year!

Messenger

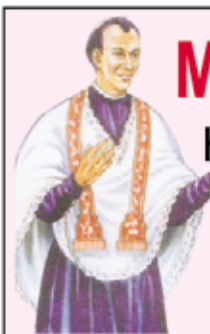
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Feast of the Holy Mother of God
January 1



Much awaited Canonization of the Apostle of Sri Lanka

Holy Father, Pope Francis will canonize the Apostle of Sri Lanka, Blessed Joseph Vaz at the Concelebrated Holy Mass at Galle Face Green, Colombo on January 14.

The Holy Father will visit Sri Lanka from January 13 to 15.



FLOODY HELL

Deluge enters the political debate



In one of Sri Lanka's worst ever deluges more than 25 people have been killed, 1.1 million severely affected and more than 100,000 people are languishing in camps for the displaced in 18 districts.

The reports from the area said, road and rail transport had been seriously disrupted by landslides and earth slips in the Central Region, while several rivers, reservoirs and tanks were overflowing.

The government, opposition parties and social action groups including Caritas Sri Lanka are sending cooked meals, dry rations warm clothing and essential medicines to more than

a million people, freezing in a floody hell.

Elections Commissioner, Mahinda Deshapriya is reported to have told the media, he would be meeting district secretaries and other officials for discussions on whether the crucial January 8, Presidential Election could be held. Elections Department officials said if the heavy rains and floods continue the election might have to be postponed by about two weeks, which means till January 22.

Media reports said lawyers representing the Common Opposition candidate Maitripala Sirisena, are in favour of a postponement because

they believe poll cards cannot be delivered on time and even the poll on January 8 cannot be conducted in the flood-ravaged districts. But these reports also said that representatives of the ruling alliance were not in favour of the postponement.

Meanwhile, the Director of Caritas Seth Sarana, Rev. Fr. Rohan De Alwis has made an appeal to the generosity of the

people to help our suffering brothers and sisters in the flood-ridden areas. Items like warm clothing, bed sheets, pillows, dry rations and other essentials which are an urgent need maybe handed over to the Procurator's Office of the Archbishop's House, Gnanartha Pradeepaya Mawatha, Colombo 8, to be distributed to the flood victims.

Statement from the CBCSL on the upcoming Presidential Election

It has been officially announced that there will be a Presidential Elections on the 8th of January 2015. As the election approaches, what seems to be needed is to focus on the major issues facing the nation as a whole which require urgent solutions to be sought with genuine political will and determination. Therefore, at every level, violence must be eschewed both before and after the elections. A mature debate to educate the people on each one's policies should be carried out instead of casting aspersions on candidates as well as their political parties. Given the fact that the visit of the Holy Father, Pope Francis is to take place soon after the elections, we urge those responsible to ensure a peaceful atmosphere for the Papal Visit so that the spiritual programme which has been planned could be carried out undisturbed. We strongly request the candidates to ensure that any sort of politicization of the Papal Visit does not take place.

(Contd on Pg. 3)

A PILLAR OF THE COLOMBO CATHOLIC PRESS BIDS FAREWELL



Mr. Camillus Perera, Manager of the Colombo Catholic Press bid farewell to the institution after 50 years of continuous service.

(Contd on Pg. 2)

NOTICE

All the faithful are kindly requested to fly the Papal and Catholic Flag in their homes from January 1, 2015 to welcome the Holy Father, Pope Francis for the Canonization of Blessed Joseph Vaz.

+ Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith
Archbishop of Colombo



Verbum Television the first Catholic Television Channel

Telecast will commence on 30th January at 4.30 pm through Peo TV & Dialog TV

Message of the Chairman of the Catholic National Commission for Migrants



The theme for this year's World Day of Migrants and Refugees is, *Church without frontiers, Mother to all*. When living out this motherhood effectively, the Christian community nourishes, guides and indicates the way, accompanying all with patience, and drawing close to them through prayer and works of mercy. Jesus is 'waiting to be recognized in migrants,' Pope Francis stresses.

The Lord says the migrants who are hungry, who

are thirsty, who are strangers, who are naked, who are sick and who are in prison come to me. The mission of the Church, herself a pilgrim in the world and the Mother of all, is thus to love Jesus Christ, to adore and love Him, particularly in the poorest and most abandoned; among these are certainly migrants and refugees, who are trying to escape difficult living conditions and dangers of every kind. As Christians our call is to feed the hungry, quench the thirsty, welcome the strangers, visit the prisoners and give due respect and dignity without social barriers. As Pope Francis states, migration is a journey of hope. Let us give hope to all the migrants and be a mother to all by being someone to migrants as a mother who loves unconditionally and places the needs of her children above her own, on a personal level, not only with words, but also actions.

One out of every seven persons in the world at pres-

ent is in a migratory status. The time has come for States and the international communities to respond effectively to the increasing trend of migration in such a way as to make the conditions of migrants more humane and dignified. The accelerating speed of economic globalization has created more migrant workers than ever before. Unemployment and growing poverty have encouraged many workers in developing countries to seek work elsewhere, while developed countries have increased their demand for labour, especially unskilled labour.

Migrants usually leave their countries of origin with the primary aim of supporting their families. However, while they may be able to send remittances, these alone do not solve the other serious social problems of those left behind. Therefore, migration may cause social vulnerability for the family members they leave behind. The results can be drastic, lead-

ing to discrimination and disempowerment, affecting children's schooling, and in some cases even facilitating trafficking in human beings. Special measures and attention are therefore required to ensure that the migration of a family member does not lead to the suffering of those left behind. These different categories face different problems that need focused attention. This issue has been growing in importance in recent years.

Migrant workers contribute to the economies of their host countries and the remittances they send home help to boost the economies of their countries of origin. Yet at the same time migrant workers often enjoy little social protection and are vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking. Skilled migrant workers are less vulnerable to exploitation, but their departure has deprived some developing countries of valuable labour needed for their

own economies.

The multicultural character of society today, encourages the Church to take on new commitments of solidarity, communion and evangelization. Migration movements, in fact, call us to deepen and strengthen the values needed to guarantee peaceful coexistence between persons and cultures. Achieving mere tolerance that respects diversity and ways of sharing between different backgrounds and cultures is not sufficient. This is precisely where the Church contributes to overcoming frontiers and encouraging the "moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization ... towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world"

His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Harold Anthony Perera

NOTICE

The Archdiocesan Bulletin 'Koinonia' will be publishing a special issue. This issue will include messages from His Excellency, the Apostolic Nuncio, His Eminence, the Cardinal and the other Bishops and the Archbishops Emeriti.

There are 15 articles on relevant topics pertaining to the theme written by Hon. Justice C.G. Weeramantry, Mr. Jehan Perera, Rev. Fr. Mervyn Fernando and Pope Francis and the smell of the sheep. The Pope Visit will be a blessing to the post-war healing process.

The Pope's message to women and women religious, the impact of the Pope Visit to our attitudes to worship and many other articles.

I would be thankful to other Diocesan Bulletin Editors to kindly let me know how many copies of this special issue your Diocese would need. A copy costs Rs. 100/-

Awaiting a favourable response as early as possible.

h Rt. Rev. Dr. Marius Peiris
Auxiliary Bishop - Archdiocese of Colombo

'Bakthi Prabodanaya' Convention - 2014

The issue of letters of appointment to the staff and distribution agents of 'Bakthi Prabodanaya' - the Sinhala Catholic monthly magazine - published by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate was the highlight of the annual convention held at the Centre for Society and Religion recently.

While the release of the new-look 'Bakthi Prabodanaya' printed on high quality paper was a special event on this day the first copy of the book 'Nasanna Epa' authored by Rev. Fr. Damian Fernando OMI, was also released at this event.

It was also announced that the 'Bakthi Prabodanaya' will

henceforth be printed on high quality paper as a publication of the Colombo Catholic Press.

Present on this occasion were Rev. Fr. Mahendra Goonetilleke, Director/Editor, Colombo Catholic Press and Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi, Editor, Gnanartha Pradeepaya.



The event was organized by Rev. Fr. Lal Pushpadeva OMI, Editor, Bakthi Prabodanaya and the Editorial staff.

T. Sunil Fernando

Catholic Dharmacharya Certificate Examination 2015

The Sri Lanka Examinations Department will conduct a special certificate examination for Sunday School Teachers titled 'Catholic Dharmacharya Certificate Examination'. Arrangements have been made to conduct this examination on October 2015. This will be gazetted shortly and applications called for.

This examination will consist of five papers. Each paper will have a time limit of three hours. The five papers will cover the following topics:

- Holy Bible

- Liturgy and the Sacraments
- History of the Church (World and Sri Lanka Church History)
- Catechesis
- Social Doctrine of the Church (Teachings of the Church)

The detailed syllabi covering the above topics and a model question paper is published in the current issue of 'Daham Maga' magazine issued by the National Catechetical Centre.

Rev. Fr. Piya Janaka Fernando
National Catechetical Director

A pillar of the ...

Contd. from Pg. 1

Joining the Colombo Catholic Press on June 15, 1964 Mr. Camillus Perera's dedication and loyalty saw him rise to the position of Manager.

On December 20, the Director and staff of the Colombo Catholic Press felicitated Mr. Camillus Perera and a plaque in appreciation of his service was presented to him.

The picture shows Rev. Fr. Mahendra Gunatillake Director, Rev. Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi, Editor, Gnanartha Pradeepaya, Rev. Fr. Mano Kumara Nagarathnam, Editor, Gnana Oli and Rev. Fr. Rohan de Alwis, Director, Caritas Seth Sarana and former Director of the Colombo Catholic Press making the presentation to Mr. Camillus Perera.

CATHOLIC PRESS WEBSITE

www.colombocatholicpress.com

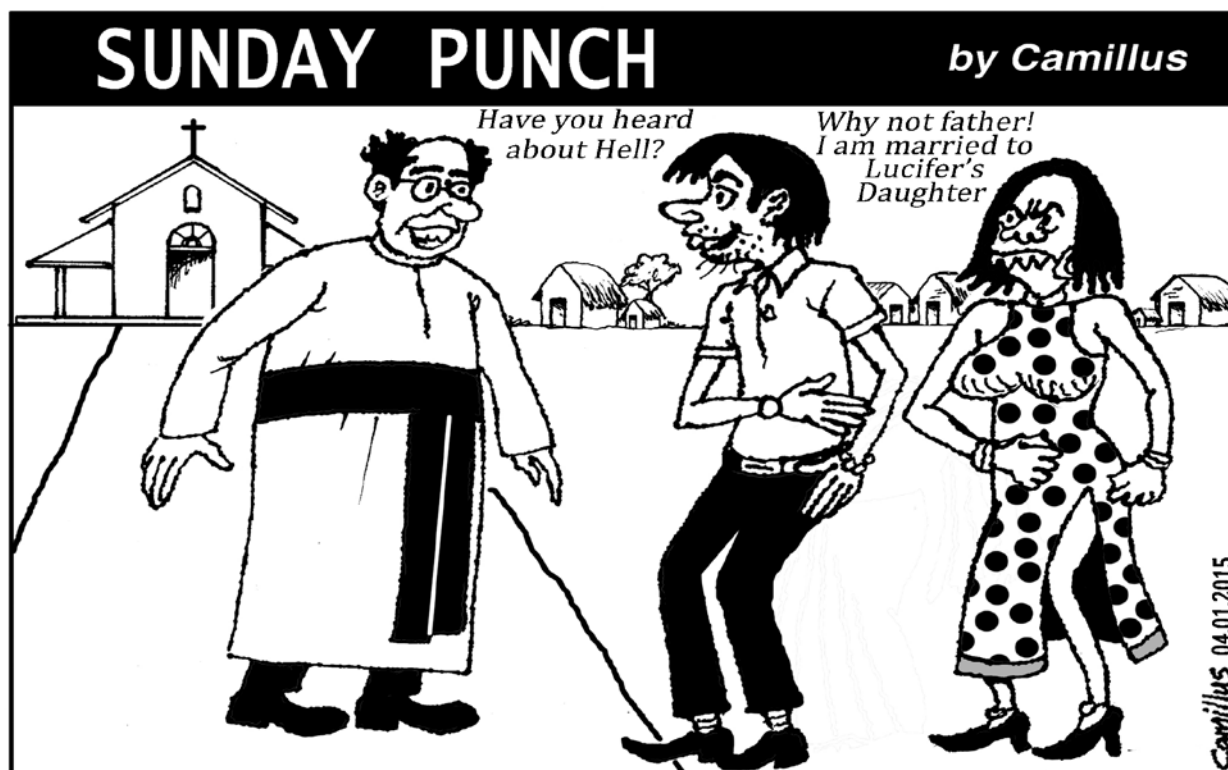
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Politics and Christian Responsibility

By Prof. Anton Meemana

What if?

Had Jesus been around, He would never have supported corrupt, indecent, arrogant, immoral, ruthless, heartless, violent, dishonest, power-hungry and obscene politicians. This observation becomes very clear when we read and discern what Jesus said regarding the character of King Herod Antipas; "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow,...'" (Luke 13:32).

A Christian can never approve or support people who are "filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity and who are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedi-

ent to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless and ruthless" (Romans 1:29-31).

The kind of politicians we need

We need politicians who interiorly possess "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23) and, who would truly try to reform their lives. In the past, a politician may have been a very corrupt person but he or she can always repent, change and reform his or her life. He or she can begin a new life, a clean life, a repented life at any moment. This election time is the best moment for that. An unrepented life is not worth living.

There is something pernicious, evil and devilish about too much political power. The Devil himself is the best authority about it. "And the devil took Jesus up and showed him

all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time and said to him "to you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours" (Luke 4:5-6).

Two masters cannot be served

Politicians who want to remain in power at any cost end up truly worshipping the devil when they resort to witchcraft, spells, charm, horoscope astrology, voodoo practices, black magic, etc.

Their actions clearly reflect the spirit of Satan. As Fr. Pascal P. Parante, an authority on demonology, points out; "Satan with the assistance of his demons extends this 'reign of death' in three principal manners: by seductive temptations; by diabolical obsessions and possessions; by all sorts of black magic, spiritism and, the

superstitions of idolatry."

A Christian never supports politicians who worship the devil directly or indirectly. A Christian cannot serve two masters. Either we are on the side of God or on the side of Satan. We must always be on guard against the devil. As Charles Baudelaire says; "The devil's deepest wile is to persuade us that he does not exist."

We must work and pray for the interior conversion of corrupt politicians while witnessing to the truth and voting according to Gospel values. As Christ demands of us; "I tell you... unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,5).

If we choose wrong people, the poor people will suffer. Which means Christ will suffer. Then Christ will ask us; "What have you done to the least of my brothers and sisters?"

Let me end this short reflection by quoting Saint Paul



again; "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the spirit of our God" (1 Cor6:9-11).

Statement from the CBCSL ...

Contd. from Pg. 1

The CBCSL wishes to appeal to all those concerned to maintain the principles of democracy and absolute transparency which are necessary to conduct a free and fair election. It is extremely important that there be an atmosphere of freedom to express differing views on matters of policy regarding issues confronting the country, if there is to be a free and fair election. Whoever is elected should ensure that the rule of law is maintained in the country and the necessary constitutional and legal changes are made in order to ensure that Sri Lanka becomes a true participatory democracy.

We also expect a stronger commitment towards establishing peace and reconciliation in the country so that all citizens of the land could live with dignity and equality.

We wish to reiterate that it is the inalienable right of every citizen to cast his/her vote without fear or favour, respecting the right of every citizen to do so. Every assistance must be rendered to all those responsible for the conducting of the election to maintain the highest levels of justice in this endeavour. Absolute transparency should be observed with regard to the electoral process respecting all the laws governing the same.

[Signature]

h His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith
President - CBCSL, Archbishop of Colombo.

[Signature]

h Rt. Rev. Dr. Rayappu Joseph
Vice President - CBCSL, Bishop of Mannar.

[Signature]

h Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Savundranayagam
Bishop of Jaffna.

[Signature]

h Rt. Rev. Dr. J. Winston S. Fernando, S.S.S
Bishop of Badulla.

[Signature]

h Rt. Rev. Dr. Cletus C. Perera, O.S.B
Bishop of Ratnapura.

[Signature]

h Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Ponniah
Bishop of Batticaloa.

[Signature]

h Rt. Rev. Dr. F. L. Emmanuel Fernando
Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo.

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h Rt. Rev. Dr. Maxwell G. Silva
Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo.

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h Rt. Rev. Dr. Valence Mendis
Secretary General - CBCSL, Bishop of Chilaw.

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h Rt. Rev. Dr. J. Kingsley Swampillai
Bishop of Trincomalee.

[Signature]

h Rt. Rev. Dr. Vianney Fernando
Bishop of Kandy.

[Signature]

h Rt. Rev. Dr. Norbert M. Andradi, O.M.I
Bishop of Anuradhapura.

[Signature]

h Rt. Rev. Dr. Harold A. Perera
Bishop of Kurunegala.

[Signature]

h Rt. Rev. Dr. Raymond K. Wickramasinghe
Bishop of Galle.

[Signature]

h Rt. Rev. Dr. Marius Peiris
Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo.

Given on 02nd December 2014.

Pope Francis in historic US-Cuba rapprochement

VATICAN RADIO - Pope Francis played a very significant role in facilitating the rapprochement between the US and Cuba, which took place recently. Speaking in an exclusive interview with Vatican Radio, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State, spoke of the Holy See's satisfaction over the agreement between the US and Cuba to restore diplomatic ties and praised the leaders of the two nations for their courageous decision.

United States President US, Barack Obama had also said that Pope Francis played a role in bringing him and Cuban leader Raul Castro together.

"His Holiness Pope Francis issued a personal appeal to me and to Cuba's President Raul Castro, urging us to resolve Alan's case and to address Cuba's interest in the release of three Cuban agents who have been jailed in the United States for over 15 years," Obama said

Q: What was the specific role of Pope Francis - the first Pope to come from the South American continent?

A. I would like to repeat the satisfaction of the Holy See for this important step in the relations between the United States and Cuba and also to stress that the role of the Holy Father was very significant in this conclusion, writing to the two Presidents, Barack Obama and Raul Castro of Cuba and stressing the importance of finding a solution to their historical differences.

Q. What was the Holy See's diplomatic role in these negotiations?

A. In this case, the Holy See has tried to facilitate the dialogue between the two parties according to the objective that the Holy Father Pope Francis has given to the diplomacy of the Holy See - which is to build bridges between persons and groups and nations. And then it was, let's say, a service of facilitating and of promoting the dialogue between the two parties.

Q. The roles of President Barack Obama and the Cuban President Raul Castro were also important in these negotiations?

A. Of course, of course. I would like to, just to highlight the courage they had in this decision. It is a decision, I think...very important and of course, not everybody agrees with that but I think that it was important from the side of the two presidents to have the courage and the strength to make such a decision. And I think that we have really, finally, at the end, to thank God who inspired such good sentiments and intentions of the two leaders.

THE CATHOLIC WEEKLY SRI LANKA
Messenger
 SINCE 1869

EDITORIAL

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January 4, 2015

Lord, give us holy families for 2015

As we move into 2015, millions of people will give and receive "Happy New Year" greetings generating goodwill and positive vibrations that the world needs. Yet, we need to go beyond because this is a crucial year of special blessing - with the Presidential Election on January 8, Pope Francis coming here on January 13 for the canonization of Sri Lanka's first saint, the Blessed Joseph Vaz on January 14.

Instead of frivolously making new year resolutions which are often broken the next day we need to ask the Lord to lead us into a deeper inner transformation and liberation so that we could corporate with God in rebuilding the Church and society.

We celebrated the feast of the Holy Family on Sunday, December 28 and with it began the year of the Holy Family. As the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium* #11, tell us, the family is the Domestic Church and the nucleus of the Church and society. If we have 500 to 1000 holy families in our parishes it would be a vibrant parish flowing with love, peace and joy, forgiveness and compassion, caring, feet-washing and sacrificial service to others.

For this to happen the members of every family need to allow the Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to liberate them from the deepest form of slavery which most are not even aware of. This is the slavery to selfishness, self-centredness, the desire for personal gain, power, prestige and popularity. Until and unless the Lord inwardly liberates us from this slavery any freedom or religion we are talking about would be largely meaningless.

Jesus Himself has often and powerfully told us that "unless a grain of seed falls to the ground and dies it will remain a single seed. But if it dies it will produce fruits abundantly."

St John the Baptist whose feast we will be celebrating on January 11 was the greatest of all prophets other than Jesus Christ. He prepared the way for the Lord but when Jesus came and people started going to the Messiah, the disciples of John the Baptist complained to him. St John the Baptist then made a profound and perhaps one of the most important prophetic statements in the Bible. He said, "That is how it must be. Christ must increase and I must decrease."

Yes indeed. The "I" or the "My" factor the ego and the subtle attempts to promote self image need to be surrendered to the Lord so that He could liberate us from inside and make us more and more like Him. Till we come to the stage where as St Paul said we also could say "It is no longer I that live but Christ lives in me" Galatians 2:22. Unless the members of the family gradually experience this transformation or liberation our good deeds will be like filthy rags, as the Bible says, because we are doing it with ulterior motives. If we go on like that we may ultimately face the judgment that Jesus proclaimed on the religious leaders of His time - "Hypocrites, sanctimonious humbugs and white-washed sepulchers." We don't want such labels on our collars or our graves, do we?

Through the widely known and most important parable of the Good Samaritan, the Lord shows us the main difference between God and the people. Like the Good Samaritan God is absolutely and all the time other centred. Most of us, most of the time are self-centred though we use Sunday masks and other devices to cover it.

For love and compassion, mercy and forgiveness, caring and feet-washing service to flow in our family, flow to the Church and the country, the family members need to abide in the Lord on a liberative journey. When that happens families will become real domestic churches. Family members need to remember that rights and responsibilities are linked. If we fail in our responsibilities, we forfeit our rights.

We pray that in this special and important year God will take control and build thousands of Holy Families which in turn will play a major role in rebuilding a just and fair society where there is deep unity in diversity.

God so loved the world.... "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..."

John 3.16

God, do you still love the world as it is today? Do you see what a market-place it has become where the buying and selling is not in pennies and farthings or of little pigeons and turtle doves? The ambitious competition among those who have the power and the wealth the neglect of the poor bereft of their dignity do take away the spirit of prayer from this season.

What are we celebrating today at Christmas-time? We can still treat the spirit and message of Christmas as many treated your own Son, that is with scorn and rejection. We can also treat it as some others did and still do, with openness, a humble, welcoming spirit. We can treat Jesus with good-will or ill-will. You still take the risk, God, leaving your Son to our foibles and follies. But your true desire is that we make your Son our only option. "Choose my Son," you seem to tell us. The commercialised Christmas world offers more than a multitude of other tempting options in which your Son is not the best "bargain."

This is why you give us, God, a season in which to prepare ourselves, year after year. The advertisements and the offers, the sales and the incentives, have improved by leaps and bounds over time. The attraction is great! The call of Advent is drowned by the clatter and glimmer of the season. Nevertheless, Advent means making space in our lives, giving a chance to the Lord to speak to us, or act or "Come" into our lives. Then, we become "seers" or people who discern the coming of God into our midst and into the world. It is a time to gather spiritual treasures and not commercialized gifts. Advent is "memory" time to recall the events leading up to the birth of Jesus which had its own 'spectacular' aspects of angels in a heavenly chorus, a strange star in the sky and birthday guests of wise men and poor shepherds. Above all, it is a time to reflect on the poverty and simplicity of a young couple and a baby in a lowly manger. How different to an average baby born today with all the attendant care and comfort. Although born poor, this Baby "in the flesh" is Divinity Himself. The 'spectacular' today is in spending hours in a shopping mall, with Santas and reindeer floating around, competition for the best decorations or the biggest cake being made in hotels, the hampers and holiday offers for those who have the means. It is in advertisements and bargains unlimited. Advent, rather, leads to a growing stillness and joy allowing us to realise that the One we are waiting for has already come. Now, He speaks to us in the silence of our hearts. Jesus is born and re-born in our lives every Christmas, slowly and steadily, as our trusted companion and precious Saviour. After all, after every Christmas, we have a New Year to travel on life's way! We just need to listen to His "silent footsteps." Jesus is the only reason for the season.

The world today is not what it should be. However, this does not alter the truth that God is present in it and that His plan has neither been frustrated nor changed. He loves us as if He had to rely only on our love. And He continues to love the world and keep offering it His Son. He hates not what He has made yet, we can say, "What a world!" There are surely good people and good movements that stretch out a hand in peace and love to others, especially the poor. But these coexist with godlessness and lovelessness, untold selfishness and unholy ambition, violence and war which often seem to overshadow the good. Evil thrives in the world of today in which the sacred values of most religions are cast to the winds and the modern gods worshipped are power, pleasure and wealth. Does God still want to live with us in this complex, troubled world? Is He still our Emmanuel? 2000 years ago, it was His choice and preference to do so. He still loves the world He created out of His extravagance and then redeemed at the cost of His only Son's blood. God still wants



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to make His "Epiphany" or manifestation among us. It is we who make the world dark and bereft of light. We can only hate ourselves and in no way hate or blame God for the evil we see around us. God still seeks a home, an "inn," a dwelling place, in us and in the world.

Help us Lord to welcome you this Christmas. Come to us as pure GIFT even if we do not deserve to receive it. Help us to build a new world... to be in it but not of it. The world needs our help to overcome its negativity. The salvation Jesus won for us lays upon all of us a debt and an obligation to make Him known and to proclaim His good news. This is our Christmas mission and everyday mission.

"For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions and to live sober, upright and godly lives in the world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2.11-13).

We who have seen the light because of the goodness of our God and the greatness of the grace given to us, are called to make Him known as God-Emmanuel who will always be with us and in the world. This is done not only by preaching the glad tidings of great joy but above all, by revealing Him in our lives. Christ is born in us so that He may appear to the world through us. This one day, Christmas day, is the day of His birth, but everyday must be His manifestation in and through us, His followers. Then the world will believe that God so loves it that He has sent His Son, once in history and now in mystery, through His Mystical Body, His faithful followers.

May the world and all its people of goodwill continue to welcome God-Emmanuel.

Rev. Sr. Cynthia Mendis, P. H.

A Time of Contemplation and New Evangelization

Advent is a wonderful time to discover this joy of sharing our faith because at the heart of Advent is the proclamation of the Good News.

Our Holy Father Pope Francis wrote *Evangelii Gaudium* very much in the same spirit of Blessed Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Both are a meditation on our call to evangelize.

Our Holy Father is calling us to be spirit-filled and joyful evangelizers. An evangelizer is one who has been sent to share, witness or testify to the Good News.

We do this first by proclaiming the '*kerygma*' which is the message of God's saving love. The '*kerygma*' has the power to change and transform people's lives. This Greek word *kerygma* literally means to cry or proclaim as a herald.

When we get alongside others and accompany them and show them solidarity and friendship then we can gently share our faith.

Advent is a busy and frantic time. There is so much to do and cram in. Shopping to get done, presents to buy, Christmas cards to send, meals to prepare, services to attend. Because of this it can be a challenge to prepare spiritually, to find time to pray and grow closer to God. However this is the challenge we are invited to rise to and with God's help we can. Christmas is an opportunity for us to grow in faith, be refreshed in our hearts, deepen our grasp of the Gospel message and in turn share this great joy, this gift of grace with others.

During this Holy Season of Advent, if each one of us was able by God's grace to share our faith in such a way that each year one person renewed the practise of their faith or was received into the Church, our par-

ish communities would double in size year by year.

The Holy Spirit is the one who evangelizes, who inspires us to share our faith and who gives us strength, wisdom and courage. We need this courage to examine our conscience and ask ourselves: Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Where does your true and real joy come from? We evangelize and win others for Christ by first turning back to God and embracing the Gospel again.

In the strength and power of the Holy Spirit we are being called to enter into a period of a new chapter of evangelization (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 2).

Evangelii Gaudium is, if you like, a meditation on what it means to be a spirit-filled evangelizer. It is inspiring, challenging and in parts amusing and light hearted. Pope Francis jokes that believers should not be miserable, joyless 'sourpusses' and gently chides that we should not look as if we have just returned from a funeral. He is of course a striking witness himself of joy, confidence and hope in the gospel. However he also says, somewhat sadly "I am aware that nowadays documents do not arouse the same interest as in the past and are quickly forgotten. (*Evangelii Gaudium* 25). We should strive to prove him wrong and study it, pray on it and live it.

Advent is a wonderful time for us to know a renewed encounter with the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We come to know this love by proclaiming the Gospel, first to ourselves, and then to others. We are being called to give the gospel away, seize it and live it, spread it and share it, so that we become living witnesses of God's joy, light and hope in

the world. St. Irenaeus said, "By His coming Christ brought with Him all newness".

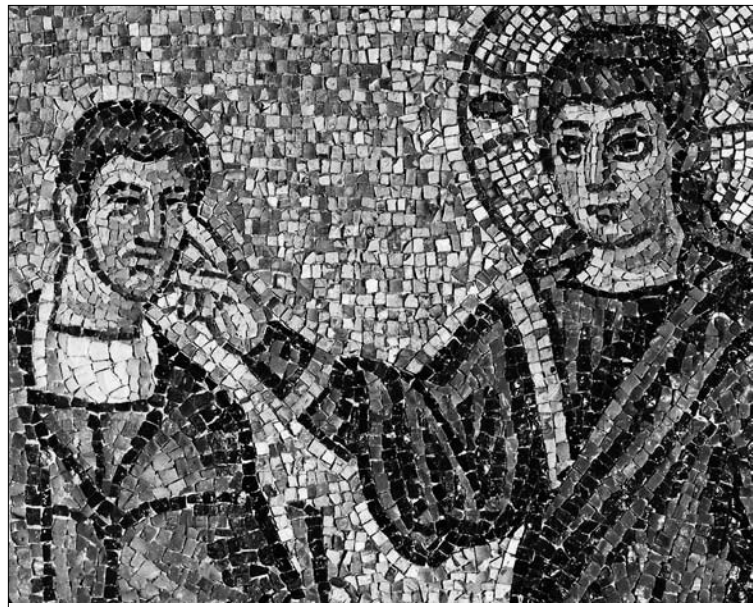
The joy of the Gospel is such that it cannot be taken away from us by anyone or anything (John 16:22). Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. However, we must guard against a certain defeatism or negativity which can subtly pervade and influence the way we think.

As Pope Francis says, "nobody can give up battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand". If we start without confidence we have lost half the battle and have buried our talents. Of course we are aware of our weaknesses and frailties as were Zechariah and Elizabeth but the Spirit raises us up and gives us His strength, wisdom and joy.

Advent holds out a wonderful opportunity for us to contemplate our Blessed Mother Mary. When we do so, we notice a homely warmth that enters all our efforts to living the Christian life. Through the work of God's grace we become more tender, more gracious and more humble before God and others. We are those who have embraced the spirit of Mary our Mother. This is why she is the model of the New Evangelization; she is full of love and compassion and reveals the loving heart of the Father. The gift to evangelize, a gift we have all received through Baptism, is a gentle gift that does not force itself nor is it weak or uncertain but recognizes how everyone is created in the image and likeness of God.

Through Baptism we are immersed into the life of the Trinity. When we witness to having a relationship with God we bear witness to God as Blessed Trinity.

To be an evangelizer is to be someone who proclaims



the faith, to bear witness to the very mercy of God. It is this quality of mercy which attracts others because in this mercy we all encounter God's goodness, kindness and forgiveness.

Pope Francis is leading the Church in a new Chapter focused on the New Evangelization.

He is calling us all – Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Religious and Lay faithful to turn over a new page. No one is excluded, all are invited and together we are united in a common cause – to proclaim the riches and treasures of Christ.

Our Holy Father expresses his vision simply, beautifully and elegantly: "How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for new chapters of Evangelization full of flavour and joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 261).

The Holy Spirit is the one who creates in us a burning heart of love which makes us spirit-filled evangelizers whose hearts burn for love of God and the proclamation of the Gospel.

For us Catholics, the Church's New Year begins with

the Holy Season of Advent. Let us respond to the invitation of Pope Francis and follow his example. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to cultivate the fruit of the Gospel joy within us. Let us embrace with grace, the way of humility demonstrated by John the Baptist and our Blessed Mother Mary, Mother of God and find the happiness of heaven beginning right here on earth.

To be an evangelizer, to be someone who proclaims the faith, is to bear witness to the very mercy of God. It is this quality of mercy which attracts others because in this mercy we can all encounter God's goodness, kindness and forgiveness.

PRAYER

Lord help us to see *Evangelii Gaudium* as a blueprint, a Magna Carta, a road map giving light and wisdom for us to build a true, solid and deep foundation for our lives in you, the joy and hope of our life. Teach us Lord, to be an evangelizer that is able to accompany and identify with others whilst at the same time holding out the hope of the Gospel. Amen.

Eric Jeevaraj

Thoughts on "Darkness and Light"

The creation story in Genesis 1:3 says, God said "Let there be light" and there was light.' These were 'God's very first words in creating this stunning and beautiful world. The world of which God was "pleased" (Gn.1:25). In numerous places in the Bible we find God exemplified as "Light" and Jesus our Lord Himself said "I am the Light."

Most probably based on the Biblical perspective, the general theological and spiritual belief is that "Light," is good, and evil and bad is very often illustrated as "Darkness."

I would like to share some thoughts from the book 'Learning to Walk in the Dark' authored by Barbara Brown

Taylor, in which she gives quite a different viewpoint of "Darkness" and "Light" that calls us to think about these two elements in a broader concept.

All of us have experienced, that in the absence of light, 'darkness' has a tendency to make us scary or give us creepy feelings. We also know that darkness is linked with the absence of God's presence in our lives. Yes indeed the absence of light – the Light of God – should definitely give us a creepy feeling.

On the other hand when surrounded by darkness we also experience things that are helpful and beneficial to our lives. Take for instance the time we lay sleepless in the dark, our thoughts help us realise things

and sometimes during such times we are inspired emotionally and spiritually. Darkness also gives us an opportunity to gain control or come to terms with difficult situations in our lives. Above all surrounded by darkness in a quiet serene place we are able to connect ourselves and encounter God.

If we turn our thoughts to some of the glorious events that are recorded in the Bible we would also see that God can reveal His splendour amidst darkness as much as in the light.

The exodus from Egypt happened at night. God met Moses in thick darkness atop Mount Sinai to hand down His Commandments. Commencing

the story of salvation, Jesus was born beneath a star in the dark of the night. The most glorious event, the Resurrection happened in a dark cave, amidst the sound of trumpets.

It is almost impossible to imagine faith without light and it is equally hard to imagine a world without darkness, because in the perfection of His creation God certainly can transform the darkness to reflect life. In Isaiah 45:7 it says "I created both light and darkness; I bring both blessing and disaster."

In John 12:36, our Lord says, "Believe in the light while



you have light, so that you may become children of light." When darkness around our lives reflects evil our Lord and Saviour calls us to "Be the Light of the World" (Matthew 5:14), by living righteous lives that would radiate 'Light' bright enough to overcome the evil of 'Darkness.'

Sunethra Obeysekera



Too late a Change of Heart

Michael reclined on the easy chair in the verandah in a pensive mood. That nip in the air gave that inexplicable feeling of the season. Within there was the clamour and bustle of the house being spruced up for Christmas. But his thoughts went to November when he was present at the All Souls' Day Mass at the cemetery this year, on the insistence of his wife who visited the grave of a close relation of hers who had passed away recently.

The cemetery was one garden of flowers and glowing candles, dispelling the gloom of the lowering clouds. The zeal, the fervour with which people stood at the graves of their beloved ones in worshipful prayer was touching. So was the sermon preached by the priest about the uselessness of

ostentatious funerals after the parents have been neglected and dumped in Elders' Homes to die a pauper's death. That had struck his conscience. Ever since then his thoughts had been of his mother stacked away in a home for the aged so that they would be rid of the burden of caring for her.

His wife Marie walked up to him. "A penny for your thoughts," she quipped. Then he broached the subject that had been nagging him ever since that November morn. "I was wondering, couldn't we bring my mother home this Christmas. She has been away in that Home for the past three years." A look of displeasure passed over Marie's face but she merely said "Let's see" and walked away.

Later she discussed with Michael what a burden she

would be during the season. As if they did not have enough to worry them over the arrangements for Christmas and the functions for the season. The children's friends would be coming for parties, they will have so many visitors, mother would be so much in the way. They would have to devote a servant to her. All the innumerable irritations that would arise. She would walk around the house touching and dirtying the walls. She stopped short and gave in, when she saw that kind of a look on her husband's face. "Oh! alright" she said. "If you really want to, we'll bring her on Christmas Eve and take her back on the day after Christmas. It won't do to have her here for the New Year with the 31st night party." He was relieved and gave

in. After all it was a great thing that she had agreed even to this extent.

All was ready on Christmas Eve. The house had taken on a glamorous look. Crisp curtains fluttering in the breeze, a beautifully decorated and illuminated Christmas Tree, a crib in a corner, carols playing in the background, the aroma of a gourmand feast.

The mother's room had been arranged close to the servants' quarters where they could always have an eye on her. Michael and Marie were ready at last to welcome the mother.

They drove over to the Home, the road to which was rather unfamiliar now. They turned into the drive. The nun in charge was walking around accompanying a feeble old woman.

By Jeannette Cabraal

From within came the strains of "Do they know it's Christmas time at all." The nun stopped in her tracks as they approached and inquired about their mother, expressing a wish to take her home for the season.

The nun's face was overcast. It took on a grim expression. You promised your mother when you dumped her here that you would come back the next day but you vanished without leaving a trace. Every single day she would run to the gate expecting you saying "My son is coming! My son is coming!" She became demented with the obsession. It was pathetic. She died a couple of months ago.

Christian Perspective of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is at the heart of our Christian faith because it is essentially about God. Christians believe that God's gracious act of forgiveness is made visible in Jesus. Gospel accounts of healing and parables proclaim that God's forgiveness was central to Jesus' ministry and teaching.

Forgiveness, therefore, becomes central to the task of Christian living. Jesus asserts its centrality in Christian living in the Lord's Prayer. Further, Jesus insists that disciples forgive "not seven times, but seventy times seven," (Matthew 18: 21-22). Jesus tells us that we need to be gracious and generous in forgiving like God is in forgiving. Our invitation is to develop within us a forgiving spirit towards those who wrong us just as God is always doing toward us.

It is not an easy task to forgive someone who has offended us and yet shows us no sign of any repentance. As humans, we are limited in our capacity to forgive. But the unconditional nature of God's forgiveness calls us to go beyond any human conception of fairness and justice. The Gospels report to us that Jesus did not wait for those who nailed Him to the cross to ask for forgiveness. He prayed to His Father to forgive them and He even provided an excuse for what they were doing.

As Christians, therefore, we are called to forgive unconditionally even if the offender does not sincerely ask for forgiveness. When we cannot do it we need to pray to God to forgive our offenders. The example of Jesus asking His father to forgive His enemies while hanging on the cross calls us to pray to God to

forgive our offenders when we cannot do it on our own in our daily living.

From a Christian perspective human forgiveness is considered to be a call to imitate the divine. With our human efforts to imitate God in forgiving others we also need God's grace because when hurts are deep forgiveness becomes difficult. When forgiveness becomes difficult for us God in His grace will give us the power to do it. Therefore, forgiveness is what humans do with the help of God's grace. God is a part of any forgiveness we give or receive.

Within the context of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness we also need to look at the goal of forgiveness from a Christian viewpoint. Christians believe that God forgives us in order to heal our broken relationship, with God, with ourselves, with others and with the whole of creation. God's forgiveness of sins leads us to be reconciled with God. Since human forgiveness is embedded in divine forgiveness, the purpose of human forgiveness must also meet the goal of divine forgiveness. In forgiving others we are looking to the healing of relationships. Forgiveness is, therefore, both a gift for the self and a gift to the other person.

For us, Christians, forgiveness is not only a letting go of our negative emotions but also it is an attempt to restore relationships. Forgiveness, therefore, serves as remedy for broken vertical and horizontal relationships.

Courtesy, Ut Unum Sint
Diocese of Batticaloa

Jesus Our Prince of Peace



Jesus our Prince of Peace, who was born
in a manger,
Light and life to all people He brings,
Suffered and died to redeem mankind.
Rose again and seated at the throne of God.

When we see the signs in the
world around us,
We know our Lord's return is near.
"Knowing the time we ought to be awake,
For now is our salvation nearer than we
believed."

Laurinda Jayasuriya

After 21 years of marriage, my wife wanted me to take another woman out to dinner and a movie. She said, "I love you, but I know this other woman loves you too and she would love to spend some time with you."

The other woman that my wife wanted me to visit was my MOTHER, who has been a widow for 19 years, but the demands of my work and my three children had made it possible to visit her only occasionally. That night I called to invite her to go out for dinner and a movie.

"What's wrong, are you well?" she asked. My mother is the type of woman who suspects that a late night call or a surprise invitation is a sign of bad news.

"I thought that it would be pleasant to



spend some time with you," I responded. "Just the two of us."

She thought about it for a moment, and then said...

"I would like that very much."

That Friday after work, as I drove over to pick her up, I was a bit nervous. When I arrived at her house, I noticed that she, too, seemed to be nervous about our date. She waited in the door with her coat on. She had curled her hair and was wearing the dress that

Being A Mother

she had worn to celebrate her last wedding anniversary. She smiled from a face that was as radiant as an angel's.

"I told my friends that I was going to go out with my son and they were impressed," she said, as she got into the car. "They can't wait to hear about our meeting."

We went to a restaurant that, although not elegant, was very nice and cozy. My mother took my arm as if she were the First Lady. After we sat down, I had to read the menu. Her eyes could only read large print. Half way through the entries, I lifted my eyes and saw Mom sitting there staring at me. A nostalgic smile was on her lips.

"It was I who used to have to read the menu when you were small," she said.

"Then it's time that you relax and let me return the favour," I responded.

During the dinner, we had an agreeable conversation - nothing extraordinary but catching up on recent events of each other's life. We talked so much that we missed the movie.

As we arrived at her house later, she said, "I'll go out with you again, but only if you let me invite you." I agreed.

"How was your dinner date?" asked my wife when I got home.

"Very nice. Much more so than I could have



imagined," I answered.

A few days later, my mother died of a massive heart attack. It happened so suddenly that I didn't have a chance to do anything for her. Some time later, I received an envelope with a copy of a restaurant receipt from the same place mother and I had dined. An attached note said: "I paid this bill in advance. I wasn't sure that I could be there; but nevertheless, I

paid for two plates - one for you and the other for your wife. You will never know what that night meant for me. I love you, son."

At that moment I understood the importance of saying, in time, "I LOVE YOU."

And to give our loved ones the time they deserve, because nothing is more important in life than family... and they shouldn't be put off until "some other time."



Compiled by: Kishani S. Fernando

Every year people talk of how Christmas is corrupted by commercialism and materialism. It seems as if the Christ Child lost the battle over the meaning of Christmas long ago to the retailers who urge all of us to 'buy, buy and buy'. Thus indulging in material preparations and have no time or less time for spiritual preparations.

The "Naththal Kalapaya" or the Christmas Zone presented by the Negombo Catholic Rights Protection Council encouraged a different thinking. It encouraged the people to stop and think and contem-

"Naththal Kalapaya"- spells out the Reason for the Season

bishop Nicolas Marcus Mawatha, Negombo, starting on the 17th of December and completing by the 19th. The participants were given a free hand to produce their conceptions and innovations.

The Christmas Tree Competition

The Christmas Tree competition saw the tree made of different raw materials and recyclable materials. There were trees made of news paper and pieces of glass, coconut shells and other coconut products, hardboard strips, straw, coconut husks and cadjan or dried and woven coconut leaves, empty wine bottles, a combination of saline bottles, beer cans, CDs, Playing cards and yes even a tree made of living grass. Apart from all these creations being resourcefully and ingeniously constructed most creations presented a message to society.

The winning entry in the Christmas Tree category was presented by the Vellaweediya St. Sebastian's "Kurusa Pamula" youth group. Nimesha one of the team explained that the theme of the tree focused around the "Year of the consecrated life"



empty wine bottles. A traditional virudu was sung to the beat of the rabana to introduce and explain their message. A hand bill was also distributed setting out the destruction brought about physically and emotionally to those addicted to liquor.



(family). The theme as put into words read : May the word of God be born among us today to free us from the fetters that bind our families. The tree was divided into six sides. Four sides focused on fetters that destroy today's family life. These were: 'abortion' as depicted with saline bottles filled



with water holding a fish inside the bottle. 'Pornography' depicted with CDs. 'Gambling' depicted with playing cards. And other addictions such as 'Alcoholism' and 'Smoking' depicted with empty beer cans, wine bottles and cigarette cartons. Nimesha explained that these last items had been

The Crib Competition

This was the eighth year of the Crib competition organized by the Cultural Council of the Negombo Divisional Secretariat. Like the Christmas trees the cribs too were composed for most by recyclable materials. There was also a living crib with even the infant being placed on the manger an actual baby. Most cribs were not only beautiful to the eye but constructed to bring out problems and issues faced in society today which acted as obstructions to spiritual life.

The winning entry was by the Bolawalana St. Mary's Youth Society. It displayed the life choice of a Christian. Shenal one of the team explaining said : everyone born today can become a Jesus. However you are given the freedom. There are two paths. One is the difficult path chosen by the Saints which will lead to the ultimate Christian goal of the Resurrection. The other is the easy path which is a luxurious, selfish life. These two concepts were depicted with images of the saints on one side amidst brambles and thorn trees to symbolize the difficult life and persecution leading to the image of a resurrected Christ. On the other side images and photographs of worldly life were shown leading to death as shown with a cemetery. All the images were hand made with clay by the group.

The second place was won by the Katuwapitiya St. Anne's Youth Group. This was a traditional scene of Bethlehem. The crib was prominently displayed with the three kings making their way towards it.

The third place was won by the Thoppuwa St. John the Baptist Youth group. This presentation was created out of natural products including the statues which were made with clay by the members of the group. The focus was on the world globe, which was divided into two depicting the positive life and negative life. Many little scenes showing human interaction in the positive and negative were seen building up to the crib. Everything was divided into these two categories including the star and the angel which was overhanging the crib. The star was divided into half with one half composed of polished coconut shells and the other half woven with a cobweb design to depict the neglect of spiritual life.

plate and remember that JESUS IS THE REASON FOR THE SEASON and that Christmas tells us of God's mighty and everlasting love for man.

The Naththal Kalapaya in Negombo was held on the 19th, 20th and 21st of December. It was organised by the Cultural Council of the Negombo Divisional Secretariat and sponsored by Sirasa Media, the Department of Christian Affairs and the business community of Negombo. The three day event drew huge crowds and was highly commended. This is the second year that the "Naththal Kalapaya" was celebrated in this manner in Negombo. It was introduced for the first time last year by the Negombo Catholic Rights Protection Council. The event included many Christmas events this year and focused on five competitions - the Christmas Tree competition, the Crib competition, Carol competition, Christmas dance competition and Christmas drama competition. The winners of the competition were awarded cash prizes by his eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith the Archbishop of Colombo on the 21st of December. A participation cash prize was awarded to all participants.

The participants of the Christmas Tree and Crib competition were given three days to build and present their creations at site on either side of Arch-

collected on the aftermath of a recent Musical Show held in Kadolkele where the venue grounds had been littered with such items that had been consumed during the event. In all these four sides in a corner was presented an image of the Holy Bible and the Rosary signifying the insignificant place given to spiritual life when living under such corrupting influences. The fifth side showcased the 'crib' and instructing phrases from the Holy Bible. Finally on the sixth and last side was placed a mirror with a large red question mark. This was an opportunity given to those who had viewed the five sides of the tree to now stop and reflect on how they were preparing to celebrate Christmas this year.

Nimesha explaining further said that their intention was not to win but to try to give a message to society. "If we can change one life, or one person's thinking through our presentation then our objective is realized" she said. After the competition the exhibit was dismantled and refitted again in the church grounds at St. Sebastian's Church Vellaweediya where it will be displayed and continue to instruct the people during this season.

Second place was won by the St. Xavier Youth Front in Halpe. The tree was made of live grass and at its apex was placed a huge dove of peace. The creation symbolized that the putting up and decorating of the Christmas tree brought about peace and unity to the family who came together in constructing it annually. However present technological distractions like social media alienated family members who were living under the same roof.

Third place was won by the Vellaweediya St. Sebastian's Youth Society. The tree comprised of 495



Tale of a beloved Marian prayer crafted by the hands of love

Is anything known about the origin of the "Hail, Holy Queen" that we say at the end of the Rosary? I have always liked this prayer

The "Hail, Holy Queen" or "Salve Regina" in Latin, is traditionally said at the end of the Rosary and it is one of the four Marian hymns said after Compline in the Divine Office. It is a rich and much loved prayer and it goes back many centuries.

As with some other prayers there is an element of uncertainty about who wrote it, historical writings attributing it to at least three persons. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, one such person is Petrus of Monsoro, Bishop of Compostella in Spain, who died about 1000. Another is Adhemar, Bishop of Podium (Puy-en-Velay) in France, who was the first to ask permission to go on the Crusades. Adhemar is said to have composed the hymn to invoke the protection of Our Lady, Queen of Heaven, before leaving for the Crusades in

1096. But the most probable writer is Blessed Hermann Contractus, or Hermann the Cripple, who died in 1054. What is clear is that the hymn dates back to at least the eleventh century.

Blessed Hermann has an interesting story. He was born in 1013 at Altshausen in Swabia, Germany, one of fifteen children of Count Wolverad II. Hermann was deformed, crippled and very small, whence the name in Latin "Contractus". He could not stand or walk unaided, and he could barely sit upright in the special chair they made for him. His fingers were so twisted that it was almost impossible for him to write, and his mouth and tongue were so deformed he could hardly be understood when he spoke. Yet he gradually overcame these difficulties to a point

where he was able not only to write but also to make clocks and astronomical and musical instruments, and to help the many people who sought his advice. He was extraordinarily gifted intellectually, so much so that when he was only seven his parents entrusted him to the learned Benedictine Abbot Berno on the island of Reichenau in Lake Constance, where he later took monastic vows as a Benedictine.

In spite of his handicaps Hermann excelled in such disciplines as theology, mathematics, astronomy, music, Latin, Greek and Arabic. Students flocked to him from all over, attracted not only by his learning but also by his virtue and pleasant personality. His biographer describes him as pleasant, friendly, cheerful and never complaining, always trying to cooperate.

Hermann wrote many books on a variety of subjects is considered one of the most gifted minds of the eleventh century. He also wrote religious hymns, and to him are attributed not only the "Hail, Holy Queen" but also another great

Marian hymn, the "Alma Redemptoris Mater" also used in the Divine Office. At the age of forty-one he contracted pleurisy and died ten days later on September 21 1054. He was beatified by Pope Pius IX in 1863. Hermann is a testimony to what can be achieved in spite of severe physical handicaps.

The "Hail, Holy Queen" quickly became popular all over Europe. St Bernard of Clairvaux, who had great love for Our Lady, did much to promote it. There is a touching story of him entering the cathedral of Spcyer on Christmas

Hermann overcame serious disability to become one of the most sought-after teachers of his time

Eve in 1146 while the hymn was being sung. At the words "O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary" he is said to have genuflected three times in veneration of Mary. A book on St Bernard records that brass plates were later laid in the pavement of the cathedral to mark the spot where the saint showed this devotion.

By the middle of the twelfth century the "Hail, Holy Queen" had been introduced in shrines and monasteries in many places, including Cluny and Citeaux. In the thirteenth century it was used after Compline in the Divine Office of the Dominicans and later the Franciscans. Pope Gregory IX (1227-1241) prescribed it for the universal Church.

The hymn is a heartfelt plea for mercy from the "poor banished children of Eve" to Mary, addressed as "Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope". The .. petition ends: "Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary. Pray for us, O holy mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ." Our Lady will not fail to answer those who pray to her with such humility and faith.

Forwarded by Corly J.R. Fernando

The Everlasting Sacrament

The Sacrament of the Holy Mass is the most awe inspiring, exalted and poignant enactment of a blood soaked journey of Lord Jesus Christ more than 2000 years back. Jesus died on the Cross for the salvation of mankind to redeem us for the sin of disobedience.

Billions of Catholics simulate this journey when participating in the Holy Mass which is a sacrifice of the Cross without blood shedding. Jesus is the sacrificer and the wondrous merits and fruits of the Holy Mass is shared by the faithful and the ordained priest of God. Together they trek up Calvar carrying the heavy piece of timber to participate in the supper where He gave all mankind His blood and body as bread and wine - the everlasting mystery of 'transubstantiation'.

Holy Mass possesses that enigmatic miracle that can surely heal our body, mind and soul. Our mind traverses through time, the beginning of a happening that will have no end. The last supper and the washing of the feet of His disciples. He then knows that His heavenly father has really forsaken Him at the Mount of Olives.

This unfathomable act of love is brought before us when

we kneel in church and solemnly join our ordained follower of Jesus in commemorating this sacrifice. It is a continuing sacrifice. In our land more than 2000 masses are said everyday.

During those few minutes we are with the victim - from Bethlehem to the day He died for us. We are with Him for a few minutes. During those moments of ecstasy and love, our celebrant causes us to join him in recalling beautiful moments in the life of our Redeemer starting with the acceptance of Jesus as a glorious gift from our father.

During Holy Mass, we bring to mind our shortcomings and seek God's forgiveness. We proclaim our Faith, also say in Him with him and through Him. We recite the word taught by Jesus raising our hands with Jesus that belongs to all mankind. Yes! Much hunger and tears have been experienced by all in praying for this word Peace. May peace be unto you all, how beautiful. All our revered teachers have spoken of this much sought after word.

Then we recall the words of the Noble centurion to our Lord. Quote "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter my house, but only say the word and my servant shall be

healed." The text is changed but celebrants all over the world similar words holding the Holy Eucharist in his hands.

Then the partaking of Communion. The old and the young communicants wait patiently to receive the ultimate gift with folded hands. Little ones watch in anticipation for their First Communion day Holy Mass resounds with the words of the Holy Gospel and are made to meditate on the word of our Lord Jesus, about his deeds. Next we remember our pontiff, our archbishop and all religious persons, the faithful participating in Mass, also our country our kin, the sick and those who had gone to their eternal rest.

Holy Mass could be said in a Basilica or in any abode worthy of hosting this beautiful sacrifice. Masses could be classified into many forms in keeping with the occasion. Pontifical. High Mass with organ music, a nuptial mass with the couple carrying the water and wine.

Then comes the Requiem Mass in memory of a departed person or a person reposing in a casket before the altar. Some of the prayers during Holy Mass vary in accordance with the occasion.

Holy Mass becomes a glorious page in a person's life.

In the short space of time we are fortunate to be with our Father our saviour, His son as our spirits soar to celestial heights. Let us beseech our sweet Jesus to make this participation in the Holy sacrifice a happy occasion where in we join the celebrant, the altar servers, the cherubino-choristers and above all the Victim in making us children of God.

We are with Him in His house. Sunday Mass is the most wonderful weekly spiritual happening for the true followers of Jesus. Here, we obey the commandment of God in keeping Holy the Sabbath. The church is full. A few always 'late comers', some come very shabbily attired. The same persons would go nattily clad for parties, and to office. Then we see some seated on pews with one leg over the other (kakulak pita kakulak), bowing their heads scanning their mobiles. The all knowing Heavenly Father sees what we do not see, The sermon causes some to doze, while some pre- tend to listen. Once a Rev. Father had told his parishioners to glance through Chapter 18 of St. Luke's Gospel when they come for Mass the following Sunday. Come next Sunday, the church was full. After the sermon the good Reverend wanted to know

as to who had read chapter 18 of St Luke. A few had raised their hands with lots of piety and smiles. The altar servers had presented a sealed envelope to those who had raised their hands with a request from the priest that they be opened only after they get back home. Envelopes were opened. A plain sheet of paper said "Dearly beloved child, the Gospel of St Luke has only 16 chapters' (sorry for the digression).

"The Mass is ended go in peace," says the celebrant, after the final blessing. We thank our Holy Mother for looking after our dear motherland and seek her intercalation in all our prayers. Then we pray to St. Michael the Archangel for protection against evil forces.

Then the fellowship, laughter, exchanging pleasant-ries, a little bit of gossip, purchasing the weekly magazines, and a few sweetmeats on sale made by the parish culinary experts. The celebrant joins the crowd, A happy multitude, who spent a few moments with the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Our Mother Mary and St. Joseph then go home.

Sripathy Jayamaha

The Gospel of Mark as Good News

Today the Christian community hears Mark's story of Jesus in a different way and with different ears than did Mark's community or other early Christian communities. On a given Sunday the contemporary community hears only a small portion of Mark's longer story of Jesus and sometimes we have difficulty connecting the various portions of the Gospel from Sunday to Sunday.

The study of Mark's Gospel affords the student the opportunity to read and hear Mark's Gospel as it was written to be heard, as a single, integrated narrative. The best way to "hear" Mark is to read the Gospel in one sitting, from beginning to end. Such a reading allows us to see the connections, to experience the drama and to witness the continuing revelation of Mark's Jesus as Son of God.

A beginning-to-end reading of the Gospel (1: 1—16: 8) demonstrates that Mark is a carefully conceived and artfully integrated narrative that is, in fact, a gripping drama filled with intrigue, confrontation, startling surprises, desertion, death, and resurrection. If we see Mark simply as lections read out on Sunday mornings, we lose the power of the Gospel as an integrated narrative that not only educates and entertains, but that inspires, that reveals the power of the Markan Jesus.

DATE—The first and shortest of the canonical Gospels, Mark's narrative dates from around 70 CE, the time concurrent with, or shortly after, the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple by the Romans. Mark's Gospel later serves as a basis for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

LOCATION—At one time there was great debate as to where the Markan community was located—Rome, Antioch, Palestine, and other places have been offered as possible sites. Such discussions have faded because of the lack of any concrete evidence. At present, based on a careful reading of Mark 13, scholars seem to favour the northern regions of Galilee as a possible location.

AUTHORSHIP—Nowhere in the Gospel is the author mentioned. There is no way clearly to identify the author of the first Gospel since all the Gospels come to us anonymously and names were not used with these texts until later. Marcus was a common name in both Roman Palestine and in the Roman Empire and there is no way to make a competent decision or even an educated guess about Gospel authorship. The present-day names associated with the Gospels come from a tendency later



developed in the Christian communities of ascribing the Gospels to personal disciples of Jesus as a way to add validity and authenticity to the contents of the work.

GENRE—Mark is the first to use the word Gospel within a work that is later titled as such. The term Gospel is a translation from a Greek noun (euaggelion) and has the meaning of "the reward of good tidings" or simply "good news." The term is rarely found outside the New Testament and early Christian literature.

CHARACTERIZATION—Mark is concerned only with the public ministry of Jesus, so the Gospel is peopled with individual characters and groups of characters who interact with the adult Jesus. So omnipresent are the Markan characters that it is a rare moment when Jesus is portrayed alone, and even then he is interrupted by those seeking him (1:36-37).

The characters of this Gospel, not simply the plot, drive the work. As you read the Gospel from beginning to end you may not be prepared for Mark's picture of those characters surrounding Jesus. The Markan characters are not developed to support the traditional depictions of faithful and solicitous followers.

The most important characters in the Gospel,

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other than Jesus, are frequently introduced in groups: the disciples (frequently called "the Twelve") or a smaller group from among the Twelve (Peter, James, and John), the religious authorities, Jesus' family, the crowds, and the women. A few individual characters pop-up in various sections of the Gospel, and contribute to the plot, but their presence often serves to highlight the character of Jesus, defining for the reader who Jesus is, how he acts, and what his mission is.

MARK'S STORY OF JESUS—Mark's Gospel may be divided into five sections and a later, added ending (16: 9-20). Each of the five sections builds on the previous one and culminates in Jesus' death.

SECTION 1, 1:1-4:34, opens the Gospel, establishes Jesus as Son of God (1: 1), and briefly introduces John the Baptist. Mark quickly moves the focus from John to Jesus, and establishes a sense of urgency in the story with the repeated use of the term "immediately" (14 times between 1: 10 and 3:6).

Mark commences Jesus' public (Galilean) ministry only after John the Baptist is arrested and four Galilean fishermen are called to follow him (Simon, Andrew, James, and John). Jesus' first public act declares him a teacher with authority (1: 21-22), and demonstrates that he is an exorcist. Mark will use exorcisms at strategic points in this story of Jesus.

Continuing to portray Jesus as one with power and authority, the remaining chapters in this section (1: 29-4: 34) establish Jesus as a miracle worker/exorcist constantly pursued by the crowds. However, what appear to be innocent, conventional miracle stories introduce the first real conflict and full-scale rejection of Jesus in the Gospel. In the story of the healing of a paralytic (2: 1-12), Jesus not only heals but forgives sins, a function reserved to God alone. The controversy generated in this scene, particularly the dialogue between Jesus and the scribes, provides the spark for continuing debates regarding fasting (2:18-22) and the Sabbath (2: 23-28), and culminates in another healing story.

As chapter 3 opens, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand. (In light of Jesus' record as a healer, the reader might recall that the first exorcism was located in the Capernaum synagogue on the Sabbath. The material in chapter 2 (healing, forgiveness of sin, and debates about the law—fasting and the Sabbath) sets Jesus at odds with the religious leaders. This third Sabbath event, healing the man with the withered hand, proves to be the turning point in Jesus' relationship with the religious authorities. In 3: 6, Mark indicates that the Pharisees mount a plot against Jesus' life. With the Gospel only one-third complete, Jesus' life is in danger. The religious authorities cannot be counted among supporters of Jesus; their actions move them "outside" the frame of support and trust among those surrounding Jesus. Later in this chapter, as the healings and debates continue, Jesus' family sets out to seize him, thinking him crazy (3: 20-21). They find him teaching at home, surrounded by large crowds. Unable to get to him, they stand "outside" and call to him. As they remain "outside," Jesus is "inside," declaring that those who are "inside" with him constitute his family. This is the first and last time Jesus' family play a part in the Gospel. Like the Pharisees of 3: 6, Jesus' family have moved "outside," and surprisingly, represent the second group to have abandoned Jesus in the Gospel.

Paradox of Our Time

The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers;
wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints;
we spend more, but have less;
we buy more, but enjoy it less.

We have bigger houses and smaller families;
more conveniences, but less time;
we have more degrees, but less sense;
more knowledge, but less judgment;
more experts, but more problems;
more medicine, but less wellness.

We have multiplied our possessions,
but reduced our values.

We talk too much, love too seldom,
and hate too often.

We've learned how to make a living, but not a life;
We've added years to life, not life to years.

We've been all the way to the moon and back,
but have trouble crossing the street
to meet the new neighbour.

We've conquered outer space, but not inner space;
We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul;
We've split the atom, but not our prejudice;
We have higher incomes, but lower morals;
We've become long on quantity, but short on quality.

These are the times of tall men and short character;
steep profits and shallow relationships.
These are the times of world peace,
but domestic warfare;
more leisure, but less fun;
more kinds of food, but less nutrition.

These are days of two incomes, but more divorce;
of fancier houses, but broken homes.
It is a time when there is much in the show window
and nothing in the stockroom;

Author Unknown

Courtesy: Catechist Magazine

Appreciation

An affiliated member of the De La Salle Brothers

"They that instruct many unto righteousness, shall shine as stars for all eternity" (Dan 12:3). These words of the Holy Scripture aptly describes the mission of our dear departed, Mrs. Yvonne Dias, affiliated member of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the mission she fulfilled with commitment and dedication in the five decades of her association with the Brothers. As a committed teacher and Vice Principal at St. Anthony's College for nearly four decades, she guided thousands of children in the path of true life and inspired hundreds of fellow teachers in the Lasallian vision. Like St. John the Baptist, Yvonne prepared the way for her students to welcome Christ and to become His true followers. Her extraordinary commitment to educational service was a result of her strong grasp of the fundamental Lasallian qualities; faith in a God who calls us and sends us on mission, zeal in the fulfillment of His mission and sharing this mission in association with other believers.

This distinctive Lasallian service, enabled her to be chosen by the Brothers to represent Sri Lanka in the Asia Pacific Lasallian Educators Congress in 1996 in Singapore. This experience had given her more opportunity to work for the educational needs of the poor and disadvantaged children. After her official retirement from school work, she devoted her time and energy to strengthen the Signum Fidei movement in Sri Lanka. As a founding member and its secretary and treasurer, Yvonne was the live wire of the Sri Lankan branch of this worldwide movement of lay Lasallians. She was responsible for initiating the Pubudugama ed-



Yvonne Dias

ucational projects and supported many such projects of the Signum Fidei.

In recognition of her unwavering and exceptional devotion to the Lasallian cause, she was awarded the affiliated membership of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 2003 by the then Superior General, Very Rev. Brother Alvaro Rodriguez, which is a rare and distinct honour a Lasallian lay associate can get.

Yvonne was not only a loving and caring mother but also a firm teacher for her children at home. On the other hand, she was not only a committed and firm teacher, but also a loving and concerned motherly figure at school. At other times she was the fearless fighter for the sake of justice and fair play. As Vice Principal, she stood by the Brother Director at all times, especially at difficult moments. At Christmas time, she was the Santa Claus for numerous children in the projects run by the Signum Fidei movement.

Until the day she was hospitalized she was determined to renew her annual consecration to God, which she had done so faithfully since the year 2001. But God's will was that she be welcome in heaven and be granted her eternal reward. May St. De La Salle, our father and founder and all the Lasallian saints welcome her and present her to Christ our Redeemer.

On behalf of the Provincial Visitor, Rev. Bro. Denzil Perera, all the Brothers, Signum Fidei members and the entire Lasallian Family, I offer my heartfelt sympathies to her children, grandchildren and other members of the bereaved family. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

Yvonne, we thank God for your beautiful life. We thank you for being a loving mother, exemplary teacher and faithful Lasallian associate in our journey of life.

May you rest in the arms of Jesus!

Bro. Henry Dissanayake

A Steadfast Worker

With the demise of Rohini Rajaratna, the parish of St. Mary's Church, Ratmalana, has lost a strong pillar, a devoted Catholic and a close friend of the poor. Rohini treated the Church as part of her home. She attended every service and gave her fullest cooperation to the parish priest.



Rohini Rajaratna

Rohini served St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) for 45 years. To the members of the SVP she was mentor, strength and guide. To the poor she was a close friend. This love for the poor was in her blood and she was able to follow closely in the footsteps of our Patron, St Vincent de Paul. During this period she held the posts of president, secretary and treasurer.

Rohini was also a member of the 'Neighbours in Christ' (NIC). During the tsunami she rendered yeoman service, gathering relevant information from the beach folk. At this time we had a refugee camp in our church premises and her home became a camp for all the helpers with her telephone freely available to them.

When the Church celebrated its Golden Jubilee she took over a major portion of responsibilities as a member of the organizing committee. The gates of her home was wide open and her house became the store room of the church.

She was a good wife and mother. With all her Church work she had time for her kitchen and was generous to visitors.

The end came sooner than we expected. This lively spark started fading away slowly, with an ailment that neither money nor medication could cure. God gently whispered to her to come to His home and she answered His call.

Mary Biyanwila

Bishop Emmanuel meets Sri Lankan Catholic Community in Hong Kong



His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Fernando, Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo was in Hong Kong for a stop-over visit on his way to a seminar. The Sri Lankan Catholic Community in Hong Kong gave the Bishop a warm reception and His Lordship too was moved by the missionary zeal to offer the Sunday Holy Mass for the Sri Lankan migrant workers in Hong Kong, which was celebrated at the Church of the Mother of Good Counsel in San Po Kong where His Lordship was hosted during his short stay.

The Parish Priest of San Po Kong, Rev. Fr. Thomas Law, with his liturgical group made all the arrangements for a solemn and holy celebration of the liturgy. Preaching, both in Sinhala and Tamil, His Lordship, basing himself on the Gospel Reading of the day,



invited the congregation to fashion one's life in a manner worthy of being accountable to God. Following just means to earn money, faithfulness to the marital vows, commitment for the children's upbringing, in spite of everything to find time to fulfill the Sunday obligation and inviting the Catholics to come together and work as members of the Church and children of God, were the points which he emphasised in his sermon.

Some of the Sri Lankans who have been living in Hong Kong for over twenty years, mentioned, that it was the first time a bishop from Sri Lanka visited them and celebrated Holy Mass. This historical visit was made sensational by the Archbishop of Hong Kong, His Eminence John Cardinal Tong. His Eminence gifted all the Sri Lankans with holy rosaries and encouraged them in their personal prayer life.

Rev. Fr. Blaise Cooray

Rev. Fr. Alexis Dassanayake

I was deeply saddened when Mr. Roggy Corera informed me of the death Rev. Fr. Alexis Dassanayake, according to Roggy, just 35 days before the canonization of Blessed Joseph Vaz. I know how much Father was looking forward to this day. He once told me all our prayers and efforts have borne fruit. I had the joy of working with him when he was Vice Postulator of the Cause for the Canonization of Bl. Joseph Vaz, after the death of Rev. Fr. Theodore Peris.

Fr. Alexis was a wonderful person to work with, knowledgeable, but so humble, so courteous and above all understanding. He has now gone to his eternal rest and I am sure he will be watching the canonization from his heavenly home.

God Bless you dear Father Alexis. Pray for us.

C. Taylor

Catechism for the Youth

Compiled by
Fr. Indra Ratnasiri Fernando,
Parish Priest, Nittambuwa

Section I:-

God Acts in our Regard by means of sacred signs (166-169).

The Church celebrates the liturgy:

Ps 119/164 "Seven times a day" Israelites prayed to God. Even Jesus taught his disciples to pray and gathered them in the upper room (1Cori.11:24b). Liturgy is nothing else but the official divine worship of the Church; people of God.

As the Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC) 10 says that the liturgy is the summit and the fount from which all her power flows. When we celebrate the liturgy, we encounter the One who said about himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14/6). One receives protection and consolation from God in participating the Holy Mass.

Chapter One (1) (170 - 178).

God and the Sacred Liturgy:

Liturgy was the paschal liturgy Jesus celebrated with his disciples in the upper room on the night before his death.

The Church is gifted with seven (7) Sacraments; Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing, Holy Orders and Matrimony. With sacraments we become like Jesus.

Baptism, fallen human race becomes cherished.

Confirmation, the weak become strong.

Reconciliation, the guilty ones are reconciled.

Eucharist, we become bread for others.

Anointing, the despairing become people of confidence.

Matrimony and Holy Orders, men and women become servants of love. Thus, the sacrament in all the sacraments is Christ Himself.

Hence, it is our duty to express God with all our senses, that's why God has given himself to us in earthly signs, especially in bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ. Therefore, the sacraments are Christ's gifts to His church; it is the duty of the church to administer them and to protect them.

As it is seen in the Sacred Scriptures, that Jesus entrusted his words and signs to a group of people, namely the apostles. Sacraments exist for the church and through the church. They exist through her, becomes the sacraments... power of Christ's body; for example in confession, where the Christ forgives our sins through the priest. Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders could be received only once in a life time since they imprint an indelible mark on the soul of the Christian. Sacraments are not magic. Thus, a sacrament is effective when one understands and accepts it in faith. Sacrament not only presupposes faith, they indeed strengthen it and give expression to it.

The command of Jesus for apostles was to make people disciples through their preaching; two aspects are involved here; Faith and Sacraments.

Hence, the sacraments are effective on the basis of the sacramental action which is carried out. This is famously called Ex Opere Operato.

We saw his star as it rose and have come to do the Lord homage.
(Mt. 2:2)

LITURGICAL CALENDAR YEAR B	
4th Jan. - 1th Jan. 2015	
Sun:	THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD Is 60-6; Eph. 32,3,5,6; Mt. 2 1-12
Mon:	1 Jn. 3:22-4:6; Mt. 4:12-17,23-25
Tue:	1 Jn. 4: 7-10; Mk. 6:34-44
Wed:	Memorial of St. Raymond of Penyafort, Priest 1 Jn. 4:11-18; Mk. 6:45-52
Thu:	1 Jn. 4:19,5,4; Lk; 4:14-22
Fri:	1 Jn.5;5-13;Lk.5:12-16
Sat:	1 Jn. 5:14-21;Jn.3:22-30
Sun:	THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD Is.55:1-11;1Jn.5:1-9; Mk.1:7-11

Novena in Preparation for the Canonization of Bl. Joseph Vaz (January 5-13, 2015)

We are preparing ourselves for the sublime occasion of the Canonization of Blessed Joseph Vaz. The following themes have been presented to follow the nine days liturgy with a deeper preparation and orientation. These themes, along the way of the Seven Sacraments, will lead us on a spiritual journey with Blessed Joseph Vaz.

1st Theme (January 5, 2015)

Let us respond to our Baptismal Call following the life example of Bl. Joseph Vaz (Lk. 3:21-22, 4: 18-19).

2nd Theme (January 6, 2015)

Together with Bl. Joseph Vaz, let us achieve a renewal in life being united as a Eucharistic Community (Jn. 6: 50-51, 56).

3rd Theme (January 7, 2015)

Being enlightened by Bl. Joseph Vaz let us enter into union with God through reconciliation (Jn. 20:22-23).

4th Theme (January 8, 2015)

Let us be witnesses to the Gospel following the heroic example of the Apostle of Sri Lanka (James 5:15-16).

5th Theme (January 9, 2015)

Through the mediation of Bl. Joseph Vaz, let us be incarnated in the family (Eph. 5:23-24).

6th Theme (January 10, 2015)

Following the exemplary preacher, Bl. Joseph Vaz, let us play our shepherding role in a fruitful manner (Jn. 7:37-39, Gal. 5:22-23).

7th Theme (January 11, 2015)

Let us go in search of the sick and suffering brothers and following the footpath of Bl. Joseph Vaz (Mk. 6:53-56, Act. 12:12-16).

8th Theme (January 12, 2015)

Let us grow in the devotion to our Heavenly Mother Mary in the light of the spirituality of Bl. Joseph Vaz (Jn. 19:27, Lk. 1:38).

9th Theme (January 13, 2015)

Being united with Bl. Joseph Vaz, let us pray for Holy Father Francis and the whole Church (Mt. 16:18, Eph. 6:18-20).

Novena Prayer

O God, Our loving Father, we thank and praise you for giving us Blessed Joseph Vaz as the Apostle of Sri Lanka. During a period of persecution he strengthened our forefathers in faith and fostered their spiritual life. Through his elevation to sainthood, help us to deeply experience his intercession and faithfully follow his committed way life. Grant us, your children, encouragement and hope through his intercession.

Heavenly Father, you made Blessed Joseph Vaz follow the Gospel as a true disciple of your Son, Jesus Christ. During his mission in Sri Lanka, he preached the word, healed the sick, consoled the afflicted and helped the destitute. Through his intercession, deepen our faith in challenging moments and heal us from our infirmities; help us in our burning problems and guide us in our confused and tensed situations. Help us to experience your consolation in our suffering. We are praying for our country and the Church in a very special manner. May the Apostle of Sri Lanka help us grow in peace and fraternity towards true progress as a nation.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

“...and having fallen down they worshiped him...” (Matt 2,1-12)

1. The Christmas Story of Jesus is the Christian Story of Matthew

Matthew probably originated in Antioch of Syria, also probably evangelized by James Group from Jerusalem. Being more Jewish and conservative, the Christian community of Matthew is more reluctant to be more progressive and open to the Gentiles. These older ones try to keep the *status quo*. But the new ones are more open to the Gentiles. Hence there is tension within the community.

Story of Jesus	Message to Matthew's Community
Even at His Birth, Jesus manifest Himself to the Gentile Magi who came to worship Him	The Jewish Christians should not be afraid of the Gentile mission, but be open to the Gentiles
The Magi receive a revelation from God through nature. The birth star associated with the King of the Jews brings them the Good News of salvation. While it tells them of the birth; it does not tell them where they can find the King of the Jews.	God reveals through nature: Rom 1,19-20; 2,14-15. But this cosmic revelation is imperfect. The ultimate secret of God and His design is locked in His special revelation to Israel, in the Scriptures.
The Gentile Magi come to worship, but they must learn from the Jews the history of salvation (2,2-6).	Deprived of the Scriptures, the Gentiles never have so explicit a revelation as is given to the Jews. The Gentiles need the Jewish Scriptures.
Then Matthew highlights the paradox: those who have the Scriptures and can see plainly what the prophets have said are not willing to worship the newborn King. To the contrary, the king and the chief priests and the scribes conspire against the Messiah and the wicked king decrees his death. But God spares Jesus and ultimately brings back His Son from another land (2,15).	When the Good News was proclaimed by Jesus and Apostles to the Jews and the Gentiles, there was a twofold response of acceptance and rejection. Many Jews rejected the Gospel, whereas the Gentiles accepted it wholeheartedly.

2. The Christian Story of Matthew is the Christian Story of Today

We live in a land and at a time, our thinking could be dragged to this or that extreme. Such extreme mindedness could paralyze the life of the Church. If Liturgy is excessively stressed, it would end up in ritualism and a liturgist could appear a terrorist. On the other hand, the belittling of sacred Liturgy would end up in the loss of the sense of the sacred. Similarly the over-consciousness of one's caste, class or creed could endanger our balanced thinking and spark the fires of discord and dissension within the community. Such a Church divided within itself could hardly bear witness. Hence moderate thinking is exigent.

With the march of time Matthew's church has become predominantly Gentile. He knows that Jesus confined Himself to Israel (10,5-6; 15,24). But he expands the parable of the wicked tenants to allow for a transfer of attention to the Gentiles (21,43) – no parallel in Mark or Luke.

In this *sitz im leben*, Matthew tows a middle path. Being a moderate theologian, he tries to keep both the conservatives and the progressives together. He tries to keep both the Jews and the increasing Gentiles together:

The moderate thinking yields plenty of good fruits. It could resolve the tensions within the community of believers. It would allow creativity in the life of the Church. It would seek unity in diversity, respecting the racial and cultural differences of members and ignoring the past mistakes as 'past.' It would embrace all members without sidelining anyone.

It is this thinking that we find in Matthew trying to keep both the conservatives and the progressives together. It is this thinking that is to be emulated by us recognizing its paramount importance in today's socio-ecclesial context.

Rev. Fr. Don Anton Saman Hettiarachchi

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Message and relevance

The Opening Prayer of the Mass is addressed to “God, who has given to mankind the blessings of salvation through the fruitful virginity of Mary” and it asks that we may “experience the intercession of her through whom we have received the Author of life.” The faith of the Church is already expressed in the Apostles’ Creed with the assertion that Christ “was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.” The Council of Ephesus (431) used this statement to defend Mary’s title as “Theotokos,” not in the sense that the nature of the Word and his divinity had their origin in the Virgin Mary, but that the Word, the second Person of the Trinity, was born of her according to the flesh. What was born of her was the humanity to which the Word is united hypostatically.

The mystery of Mary’s maternity is expressed in the Entrance Antiphon of the Mass: “Hail, holy Mother! The child to whom you gave birth is the King of heaven and earth for ever.” This implies God’s choice of her who is “full of grace” (Lk 1:28)

as well as her voluntary consent: “Let it be done to me as you say” (Lk 1:38). The word “conceive” applies not only to the body but also to the spirit, as was stated by the Second Vatican Council: “The Virgin Mary, who at the message of the angel received the word of God in her heart and in her body ... is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the Redeemer. . . . Rightly, therefore, the Fathers see Mary not merely as passively engaged by God, but as freely cooperating in the work of man’s salvation through faith and obedience” (Lumen Gentium, nos. 53 and 56).

The Prayer over the Gifts reminds us that in this Christmas season we celebrate “the beginning of our salvation.” Hence this feast fits in very well with the beginning of the new year. “On this feast of Mary, the Mother of God, we ask that our salvation will be brought to its fulfillment.”

The Preface of the Mass states the reason for this solemn feast: “Through the power of the Holy Spirit, she became the virgin mother of your only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,

who is for ever the light of the world.” Mary represents, as it were, the maternal aspect of God, not only because her Son is also the Son of the Father, but because the Holy Spirit, through whose power she conceived, took up his dwelling in the Word made flesh. This mysterious relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit, who made her virginity fruitful, manifests another maternal aspect of the Father, namely, his merciful love.

The antiphon for the Cantic of Zechariah beautifully summarizes the dogma of the Incarnation: “Marvelous is the mystery proclaimed today: human nature is made new as God becomes man; he remains what he was and becomes what was not. Yet each nature stays distinct and for ever undivided.” The significance of this feast is found especially in the Prayer after Communion.

Father, as we proclaim the Virgin Mary to be the Mother of Christ and the Mother of the Church, may our communion with her Son bring us to salvation.

Courtesy: Book of Saints of the Roman Calendar

"You Bethlehem Ephrathah..."

Bethlehem town of Israel remains deeply associated with all Catholics as the birth place of Jesus Christ. It is a town where most people think of at Christmas. Bethlehem is featured in our popular Carols and Hymns. Many pilgrims around the world desire to visit Bethlehem during Christmas and their high point is midnight Christmas Mass in Manger Square, Bethlehem. Today Bethlehem is a well appointed Arab-Christian town with a University and other amenities.

It is possible that Jesus was born in the house of St. Joseph's parents. Bethlehem countryside is made up of limestone rocks and still there are caves seen. The present Church of the Nativity is built on one of these caves. During the time of Jesus it was a custom to live in rooms built as 'Leantos' and caves were used to keep livestock and other goods. St. Luke writes, "Mary gave birth to her first born son,

Jesus and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. St. Luke could have meant that Mary gave birth in the cave area of the house because there was no room for them in the house.

Jerome Murphy O' Connor writes in the book, 'Holy Land' about Bethlehem. In Bethlehem many houses are still built in front of caves. Luke writes that Mary placed the new born baby in a manger and so it remains true that Jesus was born in conditions of simplicity and humility. Why was Jesus born in Bethlehem? There was a man called Joseph, a carpenter, who was a resident of Nazareth, a town in Galilee. Tracing the genealogy of Jesus, evangelist Matthew points out that Joseph was descendent of the family of David and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ (Mt. 1:16). Bethlehem was the city of King David's family. Prophet

Samuel was sent to choose the boy David, son of Jesse (1 Sam. 16), as the future king of Israel. The same idea is conveyed in the Book of Ruth (Ruth 1:4). As a general, David fought the Philistines at Bethlehem. However when he became king he did not choose Bethlehem as his capital. Prophet Micah in the 8th century BC foretold the future destiny of Bethlehem. ("You Bethlehem Ephrathah, the least among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel whose origin is from of old from ancient days" (Mic. 51).

Bethlehem is mentioned in isolated post exile narratives (e.g. Esra 2:21) but is zooms in to importance with the dawn of the New Testament. Only in St. Matthew's and St. Luke's Gospels the infancy narratives of Jesus is found. Though both are built on different literacy forms and structures they conform as to the core historical details.



Among them that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. St. Justin Martyr writing in 155 AD says, "Should anyone desire other proof for the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, let him consider that in harmony with the Gospel story of His birth a cave is shown in Bethlehem where He was born and a manger in the

cave where He lay wrapped up in swaddling clothes.

When we go though many historic archeological and architectural wonders of Bethlehem, today we are somewhat overwhelmed by the wealth of it all. Emotions overpower the capacity to sort things out and reason.

Miran Perera

The Black Christmas of 1689



With the Spirit of Christmas in the air, it is but timely to turn the pages of history back to the



little village of Sillalai, in Jaffna. Here in top secrecy, Blessed Joseph Vaz celebrated Midnight Mass in a little house where a large number of Catholics had gathered for the occasion. However the Dutch soldiers got wind of this and surrounded the premises.

They then stoned the house while the Mass was in progress and started beating all and sundry. In this confusion as pandemonium prevailed, Blessed Joseph Vaz disap-

peared from human sight. It is said that divine providence led him out of this area into the Vanni jungles, probably the Madhu area. In all probability, Madhu had its origins around this time where this 'Sammanasu Swami' began to minister to the flock in the jungles of the Vanni.

Meanwhile, all the captured Catholics were taken to the Jaffna Fort and imprisoned. On Christmas morn the wom-

en and children were released but the men were ordered to appear before Adrian Van Rheede, the Governor of Jaffna. They given the option to either embrace Calvinism and be released or face imminent death. Dom Pedro and his valiant men refused to embrace Calvinism and an enraged Van Rheede ordered them to be slaughtered. Thus on Christmas 1689, Dom Pedro was beaten to death and thus became Sri Lanka's first martyr. What a privilege to have died for the faith on Christmas day?

It is aptly recorded that the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christianity. For today Sillalai boasts of a vibrant Catholic Community from among whom have

emerged a large number of vocations, both to the priesthood and Religious life. It is but appropriate to mention here, that a Crucifix used by Blessed Joseph Vaz is now in the custody of a pious family in Sillalai, who are jealously guarding it, having been handed over from one generation to the other.

Let us not forget our forefathers from Sillalai who having jealously, preserved the faith, have handed it over to us. Let us keep them in our prayers and thank them for this unfathomable gift coming down the ages as we too should hand it over to the generations to come.

Roggy Corera
National Joseph
Vaz Secretariat

A Prayer for the New Year

O, Lord from this day, teach us to love
And be generous to live in peace and have
Enough courage, to have patience
Enough trials, to keep us hopeful and strong,

Enough kindness to be human,
Enough freedom, to keep us humble and simple
Enough means to have our daily bread
Enough virtues and graces to become your children

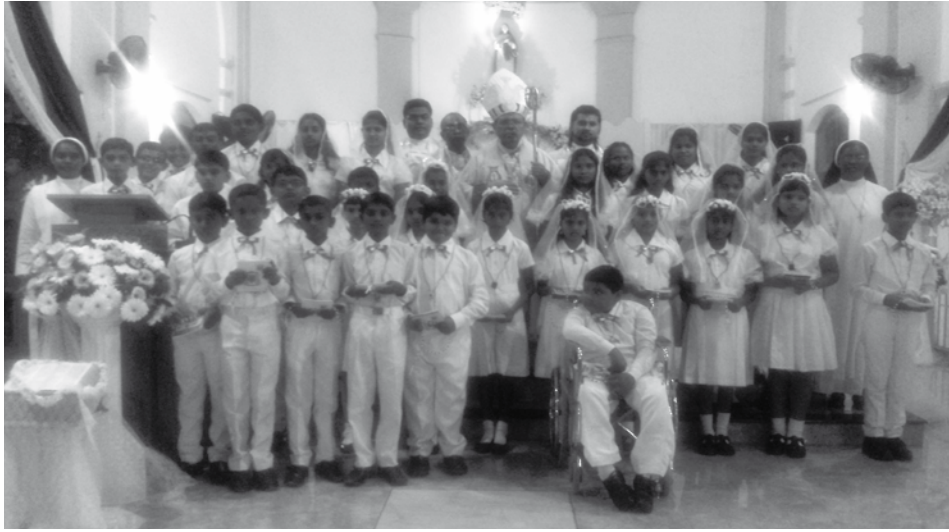
Enough faith, to banish depression and sorrow,
Enough determination, to keep Thy commandments
Enough sympathy and understanding to help others
Enough affection and care to see others needs

O, Lord, let them all be a blessing to me, to live up to
Thy will,
As we pray, Thy will be done.

Francis



First Holy Communion and Confirmation at St. Mary's Cathedral, Batticaloa



On the feast day of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, His Lordship, Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Ponniah administered First Holy Communion and Confirmation at St. Mary's Cathedral, Batticaloa to a number of students.

Rev. Fr. Ramesh Christy

Prize Giving of Kelaniya Parish, Sunday School



The annual prize giving of the Sunday School students of the Kelaniya Parish took place recently at the Little Flower Parish Hall. Rev. Fr. Lester Nonis graced this occasion as Chief Guest. The Parish Priest Rev. Fr. Joseph Indika, teachers, parents and prefects of the Sunday School were responsible in organising this ceremony.

Avishka Mario Senewiratne

Sunday School Prize-Giving



The Sunday School of St. Sebastian's, Church, Diyalagoda held its Annual Prize giving recently. The Chief Guests were cinema actor Sathischandra Edirisinghe and Rev. Fr. Dinesh Tharanga Keerthisinghe, Parish Priest Diyalagoda.

D. Anselm Fernando

Christmas with an inter-religious theme



Christmas was celebrated for the first time, by the staff and students of WP/KE Heenkenda Maha Vidyalaya Ragama, recently. This school is a non Christian school.

The purpose of this celebration was to promote inter-religious unity, harmony and understanding. A Christmas journal was also released to mark the occasion.

The celebration was graced by the presence of the Parish Priest of Kuru-kulawa, Rev. Fr. Francis Fernando, Principal of the school, Mr. R. M. Guneratne and other invited guests.

Both Buddhists and Catholics participated in the singing of Christmas Carols.

P. D. F. Irene

Thalgasagara Sunday School year-end celebrations

The Sunday School of Thalgasagara St. Francis Xavier Church, had an year-end celebration recently, with Rev. Fr. Justin Warnakula as the Chief Guest.

In his homily Fr. Justin conveyed his special appreciation on the Daham Pasal students and their enthusiasm. He also had a word of praise for their traditional uniforms.

Shriyangani Felicia



Benedictine Mannar Project helps needy children



The Mannar Project - a project intended to help less fortunate children - launched by the Benedictine Board of Prefects 2014, made a contribution of stationery and clothing to deserving children last month.

Ashen S. Senarathna



A wise son pays attention when his father corrects, but an arrogant person never admits he is wrong

Proverbs 13:1

English with Fun and Entertainment

Dear Readers,

In our 57th lesson we read about the predictions of the Birth of Christ and the wonderful deeds of St. Nicholas.

In this lesson let us reflect upon the Birth of Jesus and His Early Life and read a very special dream of Mary and see whether we are ready to welcome the Baby Jesus and do some exciting tasks.

Comments made by our readers are very encouraging.

I wish all our dear readers a joyful, blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year

God Bless You!

NJ

Mary's Christmas Dream

I had a dream Joseph. I don't understand it **really**, but I **think** it was about a birthday **celebration** for Our Son. I think that was what it was all about. The people had been preparing for it for about six weeks

They had decorated the house and bought new clothes. They had gone shopping many times and bought **elaborate** gifts. It was **peculiar** though, because the presents were not for Our Son.

They wrapped them in beautiful paper and tied them with lovely bows and stacked them under a **tree**. Yes, a tree Joseph, right in their house. They decorated the tree also. The branches were full of **glowing** balls and **sparkling ornaments**. There was a figure on the top of the tree. It looked like an angel might look. Oh, it was so beautiful. Everyone was laughing and they were very happy. They were all **excited** about the gifts.

They gave the gifts to each other, Joseph, not to Our Son. I don't think they even knew Him. They never mentioned His name. Doesn't it seem odd for people to go to all that trouble to celebrate someone's birthday if they don't know Him? I had the strangest feeling that if Our Son had gone to this celebration, He would have been intruding. Everything was so beautiful Joseph and everyone was so happy, but it made me to cry. How sad for Jesus not to be wanted at His own birthday party. I am glad it was only a dream. How **terrible** Joseph, if it had been real!

"LET'S PUT CHRIST BACK INTO CHRISTMAS, FOR THEN THERE WILL BE TRUE PEACE ON EARTH FOR ALL MEN"

Activity 1 : Match the sets of words in Column B with the key word in

Column B	Column A
1.dream	a. odd, strange, weird , unusual, irregular, abnormal
2.really	b. hierarchy, ranking, rank, position, level
3.think	c. curios, junk, stuff, jumble, knick- knacks
4.celebration	d. seraph, archangel, guardian angel, cherub
5.elaborate	e. bright, shimmering, radiant, shining, gleaming, lustrous
6.peculiar	f. luminous, radiant, dazzling, bright, glowing, gleaming, bright
7.tree	g. festivity, party, carnival, merriment, festival, gala
8.glowing	h. vision, day dream, nightmare, hallucination, delusion, trance
9.sparkling	i. actually, truly, in fact, in truth, in reality
10.ornaments	j. most odd, most eccentric, most unusual , most unconventional
11.angel	k. interfering, obtrusive, meddlesome, pushy, forward
12.strangest	l. awful, dreadful, appalling, horrible, horrifying
13.intruding	m. sophisticated, complicated, complex, intricate , detailed
14.terrible	n. believe, imagine, reflect, consider, assume. suppose

Activity 2: Answer the questions in complete sentences

- How long had people been preparing for the birthday celebration?
- Whose birthday celebration was that?
- What did they wrap in beautiful paper?
- Where did they stack those beautiful gifts?
- Where was the angel?
- Whom did they give the gifts to?
- Did they give any gifts to Joseph's and Mary's son?
- Did they know him?
- Why would Jesus be sad?
- If their son had gone to the birthday party what would he have been doing?

Answers-

Activity 1; h 2- I 3 - n 4 -g, 5 - m , 6 - a, 7 - b, 8- e, 9- f, 10- c 11 - d, 12 - j, 13 - k, 14- l answers :

Activity 11 :

- The people had been preparing for it for about six weeks
- It was the birthday celebration of the son of Joseph and Mary.
- They wrapped the gifts.
- They stacked them under a tree right in their house
- The angel was on the top of the tree.
- They gave the gifts to each other.
- No they did not
- No they did not even know him.
- He would have been intruding.
- ? Jesus would be sad not to be wanted at his own birthday party.

Compiled by Noel Jayamanne 071 8004580 E-mail: noeljayamanne@yahoo.com



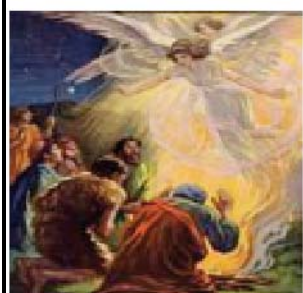
The Angel appears to Mary



Mary with the Baby Jesus



Baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph



The angel and the shepherds



Shepherds visit the Baby Jesus



The wise men visiting the Baby Jesus



The Flight into Egypt



Presentation of the Baby Jesus



Angels visiting Jesus



Jesus, Mary Joseph



Jesus with the teachers



Jesus worked as a carpenter,



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Compiled by Noel Jayamanne

A time for change



Advent the precursor of Christmas as John the Baptist was the precursor of Christ. Advent! preparing the way for the celebration of the birth of Christ; just as John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah exhorting people to turn away from sin as the kingdom of heaven was nigh.

Manifesting himself as an ascetic; clothes of camel skin and food of locusts and honey he was the voice crying out in the wilderness for repentance and turning to the Lord. He cleared the way for the coming of the Messiah declaring "He is one, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loosen." When he was asked if he was the Messiah. so vociferously and eloquently did he proclaim the coming of the promised one.

So too for us, Advent is a preparation for

the great coming, for the great celebration of the birth of the Messiah.

"Oh come Divine Messiah.. The world in silence waits the day."

Advent is ushered with the Advent wreath of four candles on the flower entwined candle holder symbolic of the season. During the four Sundays prior to Christmas, one candle is lit each Sunday at the beginning of the Sunday service.

The first candle stands for John the Baptist; the second symbolizes Bethlehem, the city where Christ was born - the hub of the event. The third for the shepherds to whom legend states, the birth was first announced. The fourth for the star which shone over Bethlehem proclaiming the birth of the Christ Child.

Advent is a pro-

found reflection of what the coming of Christ implies. The Christ child should be welcomed spiritually through penance - purification in the river of confession, repentance and prayer. It is a prayerful awaiting; a spiritual awakening. Then only will we be ready to welcome the Messiah truly.

Today more than in any period in history we need a Second Coming. The world is rife with evil; strife among nations; strife within nations; bitter combat, thieving, blasting massacring; life so cheap, violence abounding. Man's inhumanity to man screams out in deafening tones with hardly a hearing.

Today, we need the peace of that holy night. The peace that pervaded that humble stable where the Prince of Peace was born. We need not only peace at large but

peace within our own hearts because it is from that focal point that we can radiate peace.

Peace is not in the glamorous advertisements of sundry goods screeching for attention, nor in the gorgeously dressed shop windows. Certainly not in the insistent tramp of hurrying feet thronging the city. Nor in the gourmet and exotic food and drink at plush hotels with their ambience and music. The world has commercialized this great yet simple birth; It has taken commercial mileage from a profound and sacred event.

Peace is where the crib is; the lowly manger, the lowing cattle. The thought provoking stable is a reminder of the miserable conditions in which a great spectrum of the world's population wallow in.

Today, we need to bring back the sanctity into Christmas. Not so much the merry, jolly Christmas but a peaceful meaningful Christmas; sharing the largesse God has given us with the less privileged, not indulging in satiation of our own selves. It is good for us to understand how the other half of the world lives - in our own particular world, in our own country, those who are unaware its Christmas time at all. Why wait till Christmas? We should start from Advent. Reach out to others in bounty and generosity Reach out to others in reconciliation and good will. Along the path of Advent may we journey on to a meaningful Christmas.

Jeannette Cabraal,

Peace and Joy at Christmas



*The peace that passes understanding
And joy that lasts all year
Are not found in wrapped packages,
Bright lights or Christmas cheer,
But in the quietness of the spirit
Humbly submitted and still,
As one comes to know the Saviour,
His purpose and His will.
He's more than a babe in a manger,
More than a Christmas story;
He's the Son of The Living God...
The Eternal King of Glory.
The wondrous light of His presence
Gives true joy all year round,
And as He indwells His people,
It's where real peace is found.
As we celebrate His miracle birth
This busy time of the year,
May we truly worship our Lord
And sense His presence near.
May our hearts be filled with praise
To Christ our Lord and King,
For the everlasting Peace and Joy
Knowing Him does bring.*

- Maureen de Zilwa -



A CHRISTMAS WISH

Christmas Season starts with Advent. We celebrate Christmas on 25th of December to commemorate Jesus Christ's birth. God sent His only Son Jesus to this world to save us from sin. Though He was the King of kings, He was not welcomed in a grand way. Jesus Christ was born in a stable in Bethlehem. The night was so silent. Not many knew about our Saviour's birth. Only Mother Mary, Saint Joseph the Shepherds and the three wise men, knew of Jesus's birth. The angels in heaven sang praises to God. That's how the Shep-

herds who were guiding the flock late in the night got to know of the king's birth.

The three wise men were guided by a special star to the place where Christ was born. At that time no church bells rang to welcome Jesus. He was named 'Emmanuel' meaning God with us. It was such a joyful event. This was what happened 2000 years ago. This is a great day for Catholics like us. While we get ready for Christmas preparing Christmas cake we should think about the underprivileged children

who are not fortunate as we are and help them by sharing our food and outworn clothes, which would be of much use to them;

Today, Christmas Eve is not so silent. The whole world is awake. We Catholics celebrate Holy Mass. We hear the sound of fire crackers on 1st of December and on the 24th of December at 12 p.m.. This is the time when we get to meet all our relatives and friends at Church.

Carol services are held in schools and Churches a few days be-

fore Christmas and on the day of Christmas. We sing and listen to Christmas Carols and songs during this season. By now all of us would be reading and practising the thoughts for the day which the Advent Calendar tells us. We should thank God for all the amazing things that He has blessed us with during this Holy Season. Wishing all 'Messenger' readers, a Merry Christmas and a Dazzling New Year 2015.

*Vinotheeba Reginald
13E2*

*Good Shepherd Convent,
Kotahena*