

## **CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS (VIGIL)**

### **THE LORD DELIGHTS IN YOU**

We begin the celebration of Christmas, and there is great joy and hope that very soon we will welcome the Saviour into our midst.

God promised the Israelites a Messiah who would save them from slavery. At that time they would be called a new name. They would not be called 'Forsaken, and their land Desolate, but would be called my delight.' All would see the glory of Israel.

This change of life and status is reflected in the lives of the ancestors of the Saviour who was to be born. The genealogy of Jesus, the promised Messiah, gives us names of people whose lives had big question marks on them.

One would have expected that the Messiah would be born in a palace, and His ancestors would be spotless people. But they were made up of sinners and foreigners who later on became special people or gave birth to important people.

Judah, for example, committed incest with Tamar, his in-law, and gave birth to Perez. Rahab was a prostitute who later helped Israel to conquer Jericho. She gave birth to Boaz who married Ruth, a foreigner. David committed adultery and murder and from that marriage he gave birth to Solomon the great king. Manasseh was a wicked king who later repented. From these and other faithful ones like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Saviour was born.

Jesus is born to rewrite our history. He has come to live among us to renew our lives and to give us new names. He is to teach us how to live a godly life and do away with evil. He has come because God delights in you and me. I am precious to Him and you are precious to Him. He could not allow us to wander in the wilderness of hopelessness.

We have been given hope that we can move from nobody to somebody; that we can move from our sinful state to a state of grace.

How have we prepared for this very important occasion? I know that we have done all the shopping necessary; the cake, candies, chocolate are ready, the new dress is bought, fish and meat of all kinds are prepared, house decorations are visible everywhere. What about our spiritual life; is the soul also happy that something is in store for it? Is the heart clean to receive the word and keep it?

The new visitor we are about to receive is not so much interested in the external preparations, but inner preparations. God has given us His best, we are to give Him our best by being generous in everything, and show love and concern for the other person.

## **MIDNIGHT**

### **THE GRACE OF GOD HAS APPEARED FOR ALL MEN**

The genealogy of Jesus is made up of repentant sinners and righteous people, Jews and Gentiles alike. People who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Who live in darkness? What is this darkness? It is sin which leads to darkness.

The time Christ was born is to indicate that He has come to cast out darkness. He was born in the night, and His first companions were animals. He was not born in a palace, but in a manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths. He was not born by a queen or princess, but a common virgin. This was the humble beginning of a great king, the Saviour of the world, the 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'.

When we sin we put a yoke on our shoulders. It is like a beast of burden, which carries a load. This burden is broken by the coming of the Messiah. The Saviour is born to bring peace and joy. In order not to continue to be in that state of darkness and have the yoke on our shoulders, the grace of God has appeared to train us 'to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world'.

This grace of God has appeared to all men no matter the status in life. That is why the shepherds were given the message by the angel, and they became the first visitors of the infant Jesus. Shepherds were considered poor and uncouth because they spent most of the time in the desert watching their flocks, and had little or no time to clean themselves.

The Saviour entered the world in a lowly state, and identified Himself with the lowly. As He has given us hope of salvation, He wants us also to be lowly and identify ourselves with all human beings.

Sometimes, we become ashamed of who we are, even as christians. And sometimes too we consider ourselves so important that we do not want to associate ourselves with certain people. (An experience in Malta). Jesus was not ashamed of His parents, when and where He was born. He was not ashamed to take our human nature, and to live among

us. He was not ashamed to be associated with Judah, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, David and Manasseh. He has come therefore to teach us how to live in this world, in peace with one another, to be generous, and to be humble of heart.

This Christmas, will you be among the humble shepherds who recognised Jesus' Christmas coming, or the innkeepers whose lives were too full to make room for Jesus? (Lk. 2:7) Is your life too full or too busy to make room for Jesus? It's nice to give presents, but it is eternally critical to give Jesus your presence. (from reflection).

In this age we wish that Christ had not been born, because we love darkness more than light; we find doing evil things easier than good. We have turned things upside down; what is bad is good and what is good is bad; human beings born and unborn, are treated with contempt, but animals are treated with dignity. In the midst of all these, we think all is well and we have seen the light. If Jesus had been conceived at this time, Mary's pregnancy might have been considered an unwanted pregnancy, and She would have been asked to abort it.

(The secular culture is working hard to ensure that Jesus' coming this Christmas is unrecognized, as it happened during His first coming. The culture has replaced Jesus' Christmas coming with the 'holiday' coming of Santa claus.) The gifts of Santa Claus vanishes within hours, but the gifts the child Jesus brings (grace and hope) last forever.

## **CHRISTMAS DAY**

### **THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US**

Last night we heard that 'people who walked in darkness have seen a great light'. Today John tells us that the Word - made - flesh is the light of men. The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

'In many and varied ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son'. What was the message? It is a good news of peace, of salvation. The message is that, the Lord has returned to Zion; He 'has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem'.

This was about the return from exile, but today we rejoice that the Word through whom all things were made has become man. Today 'all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God'. The true light that enlightens every man has come into the world.

How many have received Him? John tells us that 'He came to His own home and His own people received Him not. But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become the children of God'.

We rejoice in His birth, but have we received Him? Are we truly the children of God? Is it only by name, or by faith and deeds? Are we born by the will of the flesh or of God?

We are reminded that it is through Jesus that we have received grace upon grace. 'The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'. He has come with all the precious gifts we need to live in hope and peace with one another and with the Father.

The Saviour, whose birth we commemorate today, is the Word through whom we were created; in Him is life, He is the light that enlightens every man, He gives people power to become the children of God, and grace and truth came through Him. Thus "in Him we live and move and have our being", (Acts 17:28).

The letter to Titus by St. Paul makes it clear why the Saviour is born. He told him, "The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to reject godless ways and worldly passions and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world," (Titus 2:11-12). Will you accept Him into your home like the shepherds, or you will reject Him as the innkeepers did? The coming of Christ in Christmas is being substituted with the new idea of Santa Claus. Who is at your door? Jesus or Santa Claus? The gifts of Santa Claus vanish in hours, but the gift the Child Jesus brings (grace and hope) last forever.