

When God sought citizenship in a census [CHRISTMAS MIDNIGHT MASS]

The Nativity of Our Lord – Cycle A – 24 December 2019

Readings: Isa 9:1-7; Tit 2:11-14; Lk 2:1-14

“... There was no place for them in the inn” (Lk 2:7)

Note: The readings being unchanged for the Midnight Mass, these reflections were sent last year, but are here modified slightly to be ‘contextual’ with what is happening in India, today.

Three Scriptural Signposts for Christmas [Midnight] Mass

1. “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light,” is the opening line of the reading from Isaiah (765-700 B.C.), probably written when the northern kingdom of Israel had been destroyed and its people taken prisoner to Assyria (722 B.C.). Isaiah foretells that a time will come when their bonds will be broken and they will walk in freedom and light. Ironically, their liberator will not be a mighty warrior but a little child, “born for us,” this “son given to us”, meriting many titles, foremost among which will be ‘Prince of Peace’.
2. We’re all familiar with the narrative of Jesus’ birth in the gospel according to Luke, which has two main characteristics: (a) It is the gospel that repeatedly speaks of the role of the Holy Spirit animating the characters around the Christmas story: Zechariah, Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Joseph and Mary of Nazareth, and Simeon and Anna in the Temple; and, (b) It is also the gospel of the poor. It might help to reflect upon the word ‘Christmas’ itself, which etymologically derives from two words: *Christ* and *Missa*. We know that *Christ* comes from the Greek, *Kristos*, meaning, the Anointed One, and *missa* from Latin, meaning, to be sent. Loosely translated, Christmas would mean: ‘Sending of the Anointed One’. Christmas is a reminder of God’s mission, so to say, of sending His Son, Jesus, in our midst. It also reminds us of our anointing (Baptism / Confirmation) and of our mission.
3. While all the characters of the Christmas story are both, ‘anointed’ and ‘sent’, it would be good to also reflect upon the ‘little ones’: the shepherds, whom God chooses as the first messengers of Good News. They are told: “Do not be afraid!” for today “is born for you in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ, the Lord.” Indeed, the true happiness of Christmas comes from the inner consolation and conviction of ‘*being Christ-mas*’: anointed and sent out! We could recall the motto: “Baptized and sent” of October 2019!

Possible Link in the Responsorial Psalm and the 2nd Reading:

“Today a saviour has been born to us; he is Christ the Lord,” is the responsorial antiphon (psalm 96) that is a “new song” of celebration. The song of Exodus liberation is replaced by a “new song” sung by “all the earth”. Examine the expanse of the exultation: “Let heavens rejoice, earth be glad, sea and all within it thunder praise, trees of the wood shout for joy!” This seems like a ‘canticle of the cosmos’ that must reverberate in India from Gangotri in the Himalayas down to Vivekananda Rock in Kanyakumari; for, as the 2nd reading says: “The grace of God has appeared for all people.” The Christmas Good News is not only limited to the small Indian, Christian community, but must constantly reach out to embrace the whole universe and all its peoples.

Three Texts from Catholic Tradition for the Christmas Masses:

1. St Athanasius (c. 298–373) wrote in his ‘On the Incarnation’: “God became man that man might become God.”
2. St Bonaventure (1221-1274) in his biography of St Francis of Assisi wrote: “The man of God [St Francis] stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy; the Holy Gospel was chanted by Francis, the Levite of Christ. Then he preached to the people around the nativity of the poor King; and being unable to utter His name for the tenderness of His love, He called Him the ‘Babe of Bethlehem’.”
3. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter ‘Admirabile Signum’ of Dec. 1, 2019, on the Meaning and Importance of the Nativity Scene: “Dear brothers and sisters, the Christmas crèche is part of the precious yet demanding process of passing on the faith. Beginning in childhood, and at every stage of our lives, it teaches us to contemplate Jesus, to experience God’s love for us, to feel and believe that God is with us and that we are with him, his children, brothers and sisters all, thanks to that Child who is the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin Mary.”

Three Current Concerns:

The CAB and CAA Concern: This month, there have been violent protests, nationwide, at the tabling of the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) and passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) by which anti-Constitutional discrimination against Muslim migrants is obvious. Joseph had to tread some 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem to get a ‘citizens’ number’ at Emperor Caesar Augustus’s ordered census. In some mysterious way, didn’t God united Godself with all those who have to produce proofs of belonging?

The ‘Inn’-less, Homeless Concern: Besides being born cradleless and homeless, God’s Son, Jesus, his mother, Mary, and foster-father, Joseph, were ‘paperless’ refugees in Egypt. Joseph had to protect his family not only from hostile Herod, but also from others who would have considered them aliens, jobless, rootless. How do we resolve the world’s refugee crises?

The Children Concern: “Unto us a child is born” – There are over 11 million Indian children living on the streets and railway platforms of India’s big cities: Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. Today, orphans, unwed mothers, abused children, child labourers are ‘massacred innocents’ in a world driven by money and market forces. How do we respond to them?

In Lighter Vein:

Pradeep, a kindergarten kid, was excited about the Christmas play. He was big-made but had poor memory. Finding him unsuitable for any role, his teacher finally made him an innkeeper since that only required shouting, “No room! Get away!” Many kiddies’ parents attended the ‘grand finale’. Joseph and Mary kept knocking on innkeepers’ doors. Pradeep’s was last. He shouted, “No room here! Get away!” Joseph pleaded, “Pleeease My wife is pregnant!” Pradeep shouted again, “No room! Go!” As dejected Joseph and Mary departed, tears flowed down Pradeep’s cheeks. He cried out, “There’s no room here; but, I gotta big house. C’mon home with me!”
