



“They are trees planted by streams of water; they bear fruit; their leaves do not wither; in all that they do they prosper.” Ps 1:3

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The Theme for 2019: “GROW IN HOLINESS”

Heb:12:14

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Gloria in Excelsis Deo



Emmanuel, God is with us

We are quite familiar with Christmas and activities that revolve around, as such I often wonder whether anything fresh and true can be said about it. However, there is a way to explore it’s meaning that may seem new to us today, yet is in fact quite biblical and practical if we understand with our heart and take it seriously. Often we come across

lot of arguments, confusions and debates concerning traditions about Christmas, to prove one's point or prove someone or tradition. As Christians, ideally we shouldn't worry about it, rather we should see where we fit in the story of Christmas and how should we exercise our faith when it comes to our celebrations about birth of Christ in our midst.

Yes, often, the true message of Christmas gets diluted as we seem to over-emphasize on secondary things, rather than the "person of Christmas", Jesus Christ. True, we have to celebrate the birthday of our Lord and Savior with pomp and gusto, however, if we leave Him alone and do everything else, then, the essence and true meaning of Christmas gets lost in the celebration, hustle and bustle of events, activities and before we realize the season is already over !

As the advent began on 29th November, the day's reading invite us to examine our life in the light of God's Word. In the Book of Isaiah in Chapter 2:1-5 we read about the vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem. The vision leads us to go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of God. Finally Isaiah summarizes the vision by asking the House of Jacob to walk in the light of the Lord. This "Lord God" whom Isaiah refers to is none other than Jesus Christ. He again gives Ahaz a sign of "Immanuel". We read this in in Isaiah 7: 14, therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him "***Immanuel***" which means "***God is with us***". This prophecy of Isaiah which was spoken many centuries before the birth of Christ comes to fulfilment in Matthew 1: 23.

As one sees around today, within himself, society, Church, workplace and family, we recognize our struggle with so many issues and our life is a constant battle. Often the battle for believers is to know what is right and do the right thing. World tells us that all that we say and do is acceptable by the society and we can't offend anyone by our exclusive views of faith and belief in Christ. However, scripture in 1 Cor 3:16 reminds us that "***God is with us***" and "***with me***". Often we look at circumstances, situations, scenarios, current position and focus on ourselves, our lives, difficulties, pain and sickness and tend to forget the

fact that ***“God is with us”*** and thus live dejected, desperate, negative and failed lives. As Christians we are not called to live this kind of life at all. One of the reasons why we live this kind of defeated life is because we are lost due to lack of knowledge. Knowledge of Christ, through His Word and the power and Person of Jesus. In the Gospel of John, Chapter 10:10 we read “I have come to give you life and life in all its fullness”. It is up to us to trust and believe in God’s Word, because Jesus said heaven and earth will pass away, but not His Word. We have a wonderful example in the scripture in Mary as how she meditated on the Word and trusted God fully and we know how she was able to sing the “magnificat” just by trusting and relying on God’s grace. She realized and understood that Emmanuel was with her.

During this season of Advent and Christmas, let us focus on God’s Word, and learn how Mary, Apostles and Saints were influenced and were able to overcome temptation and struggles in life by God’s grace. We too are God’s children and will be provided with sufficient grace and strength to live out an authentic Christian life if only we remain steadfast in His Word, trust God and believe that ***“God is with us/me”***. Because we can do all things in Christ who strengthens us and we are more than conquerors in Him.

From this time onwards, let’s begin to trust God more and more in spite of our current situation, health, financial position, struggles and pain knowing very well ***“God is with us/me”***. If God is not with us/me, then it is understood that we have no God. Jesus alone is the Lord and Saviour and besides Him there is no other. Often the world confuses us saying, ‘all gods are one’. That’s not true. Let’s believe and confess that there is ***“one God for all”*** – Jesus Christ, today, tomorrow and forever.

Advent and Christmas, though a time to prepare, celebrate and rejoice at the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us begin to examine, how much of ***“God” is with us*** or we have so many other things in and with us which don’t allow **God to be with us**. Let us be sincere from now on to give that utmost top place, position and honour to God – Jesus Christ in our day to day life and be alert, vigilant, and aware of His presence within our self. When we do that throughout the day, our focus on Him

increases and other things that concerns us get neglected and take second place. Thinking of Jesus often and acknowledging His presence in our life - ***“God is with us/me”*** will help us to give up or neglect less important things in life such as TV, movies, entertainment, mobile, social media, status, etc which takes so much of our God-given time. Also we will be more cautious of what we speak, think and do when we acknowledge that ***“God is with us/me”***.

In today’s fast moving world, we can access anything, good and not so good in a jiffy. As much as we know how to do things in a lightning speed such as mining information about a location, company, person, booking of holidays, hotels, travel, cinema, etc, it is more important that we use the same skills to know and learn about “God is with us” through His Word. Whatsapp provides so much of advice, guidance as to how we can improve our physical life, live longer, remain healthy and fit. But we seldom get any message as how to live Godly lives to the fullest. Life is so complicated and often we fail in handling it just because we do not know where to go and whom to ask inspite of being given the “lifesaving book” “The Bible” where we have guidance, methods, ways, light, salvation, new life and insight to handle our life in a Godly way and live in Christ’s Glory. In the Gospel of John Chapter 8:31-32 we read: Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”. What a blessed assurance to all those who believe and act on God’s life giving and lifesaving word.

As I pen this Christmas message, I can see the world in confusion, disturbance, chaos, conflicts within and without. Among many reasons for current state of affairs that we are in, one of them is because people have rejected “Emmanuel” and don’t want true God with them. They tend to do things on their own, think they can handle their life, their affairs and the world with their ability, capacity, strength, intellect, money and power not realizing without God – Jesus Christ, they can do nothing.

As I conclude, let’s be aware of His presence in our life “God is with us” as often as we can and remind our family and fellow brethren in faith

and most importantly live Christ centered lives. Seeing our lives and works, let them give glory to our Father in heaven. We need not worry about others as to what will they say or think about us when we exercise our faith in action. Let's show everyone around that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, our heart is God's manger and ***"God is with us/me"***. One of the best and silent gift that we can give our fellow human beings is to pray for them to experience the love and mercy of God in their life. This way some day they too will experience the presence and power of Jesus in their life and we will rejoice seeing them living in Christ and Christ in them. We need not worry or fear of any ridicule, persecution, embarrassment for being true Christians, for our reward will be in heaven. We can do all things in Christ, because Jesus himself has assured us in Matthew 28:18 & 20 – All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. I am with you always, to the end of the age. This means "God is with us".

Let Him be with us now and always, not just during this time of Advent and Christmas but every day and every moment of our life. We need Him more than ever! Let's open our hearts and let him make his home in us. "Immanuel"..... means "God is with us".

Core Team Member

Overcoming struggles through LSS ...A testimony

At the very outset I would like to praise and thank God for giving me an opportunity to attend the Life in the Spirit Seminar and making it possible to be there for all 8 days, in spite of viral fever. I did not want to miss out any session because during the previous Life in Spirit Seminar where I experienced God's love, grace, mercy and forgiveness.

In the Gospel of John 10:10 - Jesus said the thief comes to kill, steal and destroy. But I have come to give you life and life in all its fullness. I was growing strong spiritually and one fine day something snatched my peace and joy away. I was broken and deeply hurt. Even though I reconciled and asked forgiveness, availed sacrament of reconciliation, but still those hurts and negative thoughts were haunting me, especially

in the Church and during prayer times. I developed low self-esteem, rejection, bitterness toward others. I asked the Lord to release and set me free from those inner wounds, at the same time asking the Lord to bless those who hurt me and to forgive me. In spite of doing all these things, I was not set free. For the last 3 months I was suffering with spondylitis. In spite of all medication and physiotherapy my symptoms became worse.

How did LSS helped me to overcome my struggles?

1. When I started praying for people who hurt me with a compassionate and loving heart, things started changing and once again I was filled with the love of God.
2. Repenting on behalf of children, community and nations. It's my duty and responsibility to repent on behalf of my children. I started to practice it.
3. Spiritual growth- to be rooted in the Word of God. When you are broken and hurt, look at the cross and Jesus would ask you, "did anyone put a crown of thorns over your head?", did anyone pierce your heart? did anyone put nails on your hands and feet? then why should you worry about the cares of this world? I could feel that session was for me and my heart was burning within me. Lk 24:32 came to my mind when Jesus appeared to 2 of his disciples on the road to Emmaus they said "when he was talking to us were our hearts not burning within us". I had that experience on that day.
4. Evangelization a. To have a burden for people (b). Pray for boldness (c) Pray for people who don't know the Lord (d) share a testimony from your life (e) be a good witness,

As a nurse I'm doing a bit to bring glory to God. Non-Christians ask me to pray for them. Many times God put a burden in my heart to pray over them. And I have witnessed God's miracles in their lives. All Glory to God .

I thank God for filling me with his healing love. Thanks to all animators and intercessors. .

- Jacintha Saldanha

"Christmas" - Hope in our darkest moments

The shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen.

Every Christmas breaks again the greatest news the world has ever heard the news of God's healing love for each one of us. Bitterness from the past or rows at home may have dimmed the light of that Good News. But Jesus comes to heal all our hurts and bitterness. May we all experience healing in mind and heart – bathed in the news of great joy which we read in Lk: 2:11 and Is 9:1-6

Today a Saviour is born to us. He is Christ the Lord.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, on those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone.

You have made their gladness greater,

You have made their joy increase.

For there is a child born for us – a son given to us

This is the name they gave him.

Wonder, Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace

These words never fail to lift our heart, especially at Christmas. The truth is that we all need a lift– at some time or other. At some time or other we all find ourselves living in a land of deep shadow in the darkness of doom and gloom. The darkness of despondency and despair. These words of hope are especially welcome this Christmas. We are at the end of the year that may have brought a lot of darkness to many of us. Some face a Christmas where a loved one is seriously ill; there may be some who faced great trials. The economic recession, the loss of jobs, no salaries or delayed salaries. All of these may have left many people anxious and despondent. Perhaps some are struggling to make ends meet or to keep your business afloat. Maybe some are lonely and really missing someone who is absent this Christmas.

Yes, there are many reasons to feel angry and let down. There are many reasons to feel sad and ashamed. Yet, there are also many reasons to rejoice and be happy. There are many reasons to give thanks and praise

to God. There are many reasons to hear again the words of the angels to the shepherds Lk: 2:10-11. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. "Today in the Town of David – a Saviour has been born to you, He is Christ the Lord".

There are reasons to rejoice and be glad for it is precisely into this agonising world Jesus first came. He continues to come, with His blessing. He comes to bring us news – Good News of great joy – the Good News that our God is not a **distant, lonely God but a God of love and compassion – a God who is slow to anger and rich in mercy – a God who is ready to pardon and forgive.** For Jesus is, in fact, the Word made flesh – God's word of ever-faithful and healing love comes to bring us fresh joy and new hope.

You may ask:

-How can the light of Christ dispel the darkness?

-How can this birthday of Christ be, in any sense, joyful and happy in the circumstances?

To discover the answers to those questions. You may have to ask another couple of questions:

– How did He come? Why did He come? and How was He received?

Let's recall "cease to be amazed" story of that first Christmas which Mary and Joseph had to make from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem in the south. Those who visited the holy land would know it takes hours by bus/car, up some steep hills and down into some deep valleys, so you can just imagine the hardship of that long journey and the time it took.

When we visit the actual grotto or cave or stable in Bethlehem where Jesus was born, we get a great idea of the simplicity and the poverty of the place where Jesus was born.

Jesus the Saviour was born into a world that couldn't have cared less, that is how it was. Except for a handful of shepherds – not exactly the most influential members of society in their day – and a few wise men from the East – the world was too distracted and busy to even notice the entrance of the Lord as a tiny baby.

So Christmas is the celebration of the birth of the Son of God who chose anonymity and obscurity in preference to pomp and ceremony. The fact

is that He wanted to be one of us in a most ordinary way. In Bethlehem he made this point very clear. By being born homeless and in the filth of a stable – far more dispossessed and marginalised than anyone could have imagined.

Jesus came poor and powerless – to be our Saviour – a Saviour who would free us from our foes and from the hands of all who hate us. He came to show us the kindness and love of God, Our Father. How can a poor, powerless baby save us from anything?

Yes, it is a great mystery. It is hard to believe that all of God's infinite power or majesty is wrapped in a few strips of swaddling clothes and sleeps helplessly in his mother's arms or sleeps soundly on the straw in the manger.

No wonder the world despises a Saviour like that! What good is a Saviour like that, to the eyes of those who have no faith? But then it all depends on what sort of Saviour we expect, and what the Saviour expects of us. John 1:11-12 draws our attention to a slightly unexpected lesson which we perhaps too often ignore. He comes to those who have been created in His image and they did not know Him.

Another fact worth noting – God will not force faith upon us. Christ did not come to bring Heaven to Earth. He came to lead those who would accept Him, from Earth to Heaven. We had all gone astray and he came to point that out and to set us on the right road again.

When I listen to the Christmas Mass readings, I am always fascinated that it was the shepherds who were the first to see and honour the newborn Jesus. Shepherds at that time would not have been noted for their piety. In fact, they had a bad name for thieving and stealing. They lived in the fields with their flocks. They took turns in watching over the sheep. I guess, however, that they were close enough to God. They knew better than most of us how much they depended on God – for the size of the flock of new lambs each year, for the growth of the grass, and the availability of water and for security from the wild animals. They were well aware that they themselves were not saints. They were probably open and honest about that.

The Gospel (Lk:2:9-13) tells us that the shepherds were terrified at the approach of the Angel of the Lord and at the experience of the glory of God. That is worth noting because those men, who slept in the fields and faced wolves and robbers, were not easily terrified. It is often recorded in the Scripture that terror is the normal, natural reaction of human beings at the approach of God.

So let us check our own feelings at this Christmas. If we feel totally self-satisfied and self-sufficient it might not be such a good sign. It might be a sign that, like so many on that first Christmas night, this Christmas is not going to touch our lives in any significant way. But if we find ourselves just a little apprehensive about what God might be asking of us – rest assured that you are in good company – in the company of the shepherds for example – in a better place than if you felt complacent.

The shepherds were simply told where they would find their new-born Saviour. They did not dismiss or scorn the idea of a Saviour who would be found in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Instead they said to each other – ‘let us go and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us’. They found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. So whatever you may find in your Christmas stocking or at the foot of the Christmas tree, I hope that in some real sense, like the shepherds, you too will find Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus – and if you do – I am quite sure you too will go back glorifying and praising God for all you have heard and seen. If you do so then I can assure you that you will have a happy Christmas. If you don’t somehow catch that spirit of praise and glory – then I am afraid you will not have caught the Spirit of Christmas.

I believe the real joy of Christmas lies in discovering the Saviour who comes to give so much:

- Life to the full in body and soul;
- Pardon for all our faults and failings if only we are willing to ask; and
- Hope in our darkest moments.

May that be your experience of Christmas this year. AMEN

- *Member Publication Ministry*

QUIZ CORNER - Christmas Quiz

Tick (✓) the right answer

- Which Old Testament prophet had the most to say about the birth of Christ? a. Isaiah b. Hosea c. Micah
- Who told Herod about the Old Testament prophecy that Israel's Messiah would be born in Bethlehem?
a. Wise men b. chief priests and the scribes c. John the Baptist
- According to the Bible what did the innkeeper say to Mary and Joseph?
a. No room b. go to the manger c. no mention of Innkeeper
- Which prophet said, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son"?
a. Isaiah b. Micah c. Hosea
- Which prophet prophesy that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem ?
a. Isaiah b. Micah c. Hosea
- Which prophet said "Out of Egypt have I called my son" ?
a. Hosea b. Isaiah c. Simeon
- Who spread the news about Jesus' birth (the first preachers of Christ) a. shepherds. b. Angels c. wisemen
- Who spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem. a. Simeon b. Anna c. Isaiah
- Who was the righteous and devout man in Jerusalem awaiting the consolation of Israel :
a. Joseph b. Simeon c. Phanuel
- In which city was Jesus presented to the Lord?
a. Bethlehem b. Nazareth c. Jerusalem
- Which carol contains the line, "Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing"?
a. "Silent Night b. Joy to the world c. O Come All Ye Faithful
- Which carol says of Jesus' birth, "While mortals sleep, the angels keep / their watch of wondering love"?
a. O Little Town of Bethlehem b. Away in a manger c. First Noel
- Which carol says "Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care"?
a. Away in a manger b. Come to the manger c. O holy night

ANSWERS FOR THE QUIZ ON LSS

1) b. three 2) c. daughter 3) a. First 4) b. Agape 5) a. ruptures 6) b. five 7) b. mind 8) a. 1 Jn 1:9 9) c. Pope John 23rd 10) c. fruit. 11) c. obedience 12) a. fourth 13) b. imperative 14) b. evangelization 15) c. ignorance 16) c. generosity 17) b. three.

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Wishing every member of The Mary Immaculate Praise Community (MIPC) & Your Families



The Core Team and the Publication Ministry



**MIPC Prayer Meeting: Every Thursday at 8:00 pm in the Parish Hall.
General Intercessory Meeting: First Monday of every month at 8:00 pm.**