



URAVA



● WORD BECAME FLESH ●

Cover Painting : By Mickey Chacko

This drawing is adopted from the Orthodox Icon of Nativity. The picture conveys the emotions of a young woman who delivered an unusual child. She is gazing at her baby and seeing the universe in His eyes. The world around is dark but the cave is lit by the bright star shining over the infant who emanates divine radiance. Angels are singing, the Magi bring riches to the Prince of Peace, and everyone is rejoicing.

In this joyous setting, Mary is overwhelmed by sensing the Garden of Eden where the creation and the Creator are reunited. Even though she carried Him in her womb, nursed and cared for Him, she still yearns to know Him more and more. She alone keeps the mysterious revelation about the child who is not of the earth, not of human origin, the reason why Joseph is not shown here. She remained with Him throughout His ministry, sufferings, crucifixion, resurrection, and the showering of Holy Spirit. He is yet to be fully unfolded to us too...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Word Became Flesh

By: Fr Thomas P John (Vicar)

The Greek phrase 'O Logos Egeneto Sarx' translated to 'Word Became Flesh' could be one of the best expressions about the life of Christ. It accounts for the whole process of incarnation which began with the coming of the 'Word' into the world from the beginning of time till the time of the future generations living with the hope of 'Parousia', the Second Coming.

There was an age without time, before the creation of the cosmos. Time was found with the creation of day and night for the sake of the created world so that they would not get lost in its expanse but would find themselves through schedules. The time we know of works only within the solar system which orbits around the sun. In space, however, time has a different meaning. The process of creation was about making, placing, and bringing things into a limited time and space that was comprehensible to man.

The word Logos in ancient Greek philosophical system referred to the eternal intermediary between God and humans. The Bible contextualizes Logos as the Word of God. Logos made everything by the utterance of God, "Let there be.." (Gen 1:3). Logos was exchanged between God and His creation until a point when sin entered the picture and humans could then no longer understand Logos. Undesiring to cut man off and yearning to reach him, the Word of God came to prophets who would deliver it to people. Word of God thus bridged the Creator and the creation so that they would stay connected.

God is Spirit, so are the Son and the Holy Spirit. Nobody has seen God. In essence, God is incomprehensible to human intellect and inconceivable to human sensory faculties. Two words - 'ousia' (essence) and 'energia' (action or work) explain the operation of God. While God can't be reached in His 'ousia' essence, He can reach out to us through His 'energeia' or comprehensible manifestations. Burning bush (Exodus 3:2) was a manifestation. Three guests of Abraham (Gen 18:1-33) was another expression.

If God is Spirit, Son is the uncreated human, ever incarnate, the lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8) and Spirit is the perfecter and comforter by and through whom impossible was made possible. God can only be adored, Son to be lived and Holy Spirit to be experienced through descending and indwelling as was seen on the Day of Pentecost.

St John says, no one has ever seen God. It is God's Only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who revealed Him to the world (John 1:18).

Son is the revealer of God through his presence and works. Son the Spirit was eternally present with the Father and His status is eternally slain, which means He is graspable and perceivable. It was the plan of the Triune God and predestination of the Son, for the incarnation to happen, though it was at a particular time in history that He came into the frame of time and space so that he could transcend these two. He could enter closed rooms, perform miracles, walk on water, and raise up the dead. He opened doors of love, healing and forgiveness. Through incarnation, God entered our lives. A God in our living room!

Every utterance of God took form. When He said, 'let there be', it happened so. Word actualized. Through the parable of the two sons where one son said to his father that he was unwilling to do his father's will, but later obeyed and the other son said he would do his father's, but didn't obey, Jesus had a message for us. Words had to translate to actions. Christ was, is, and will be God's Word put into action.

Christmas is about bringing dreams and wishes to reality. We often promise many things in various capacities and with various intentions. These promises maybe for a temporal pleasing or maybe to address grievances within political, religious, cultural, social, familial, and personal settings. If promises were not just words but took the form of flesh, the world would have been different and better than what it is now. Our existence would have had more meaning as our words and actions would sync, setting the tone for realistic expectations and true hopes. In a time of influencers and truth-seekers, can we rise to the expectations and hopes that the world is looking for?

Words are to be used with caution as they connect thoughts with actions. As we see in the Holy Scripture, word must fructify into flesh. The apostolic commands are about living out the words: 'Contribute to the needs of the saints (Faithful); pursue hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant but associate with the lowly. Do not repay evil for evil. If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them to drink. Overcome evil with good.'(Romans 12:13-21).'

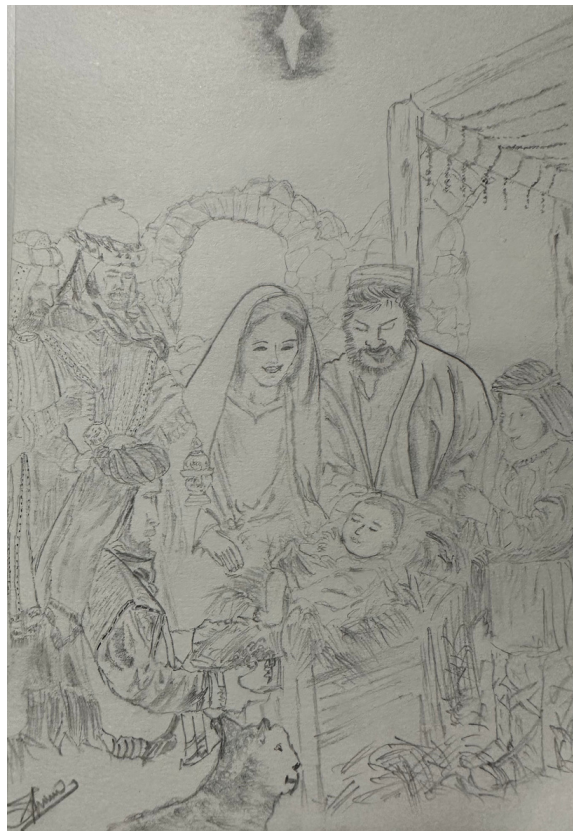
Mary received the Word and delivered Christ into the world. God is in our words. We thus have several opportunities for Christ incarnate.

Word Became Flesh

Let our words be good and choosy. Full of hope and joy. Devoid of curses or swearing. Let us conceive good thoughts and perform miracles. Let our words of promises render desirable actions. Let there be Christ in everything we do. Joyous Christmas!



Drawing By:
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Drawing By:
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Nativity And Our Christmas Trees

By: Colonel Reji Koduvath

During our childhood, I was often fascinated by the Nativity scene created in the Latin Church of our village. The Christmas carol of that church, when they came home, carried a miniature of the Nativity with them. We never had the Nativity for Christmas, only some stars and a Christmas Tree. Our father said that the Syrian Orthodox Christians did not create the Nativity at our homes as we did not believe in statues.

St. Francis of Assisi was the first to recreate the manger and the crib where Christ was born. He created it using the people and living animals in a forest near the monastery of Greccio in 1223. He created the scene based on the Gospel of Luke for those who could not read. The oldest crib in the world is in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, it is part of a set of statues created by the sculptor Arnolfo di Cambio in 1291.

For our family, the Christmas Tree was a symbol of Christmas and the celebrations which accompanied it. Decorating homes with green plants, leaves, and branches, mainly to ward off the monotony of snow-covered winters, has been a tradition much before the birth of Christ. In many regions, it is believed that evergreens kept away witches, ghosts, evil spirits, and illness. Even if they did not, it brought cheer and festivity to the otherwise dull, indoor bound, bone chilling winter days and nights.

Germans are believed to have started the Christmas Tree tradition in the 16th century. German settlers who migrated to Canada from the United States in the 18th century brought this tradition with them. It became an official symbol of Christmas celebration in the Commonwealth when Queen Victoria's German husband, Prince Albert, put up a Christmas tree at Windsor Castle in 1848. It then became a Christmas tradition throughout England, US, and Canada.

During our vacation to our native place in Kerala in October 2019, standing next to our ancestral home, I could see in my mind's eye the front courtyard where once a Guava tree stood, leaning on to the roof. I narrated to Marina how we as kids – I was less than ten years old – used to climb the Guava tree to leap onto the roof, maybe to pick up a ball that had got caught on the roof tile or just for fun. Marina then came out with a story of a similar Guava tree in her ancestral home and how she executed many similar monkey tricks.

The mere sight of the high roof sent a chill up my spine as I could not even fathom my climbing it now. The thought struck me that perhaps I would never even have permitted our children the fun of climbing on such a tree and getting on to the roof. The question that intrigued me was: How come parents of those days allowed their children such (mis)adventures?

After we children grew up into our teens, our father cut the guava tree in 1976 as it was posing a threat to the very existence of the tiles on the roof. Moreover, we children had grown too old to climb on the rooftop to clear the fallen leaves, a periodic ritual.

During our early childhood, this Guava tree was decked up by the four of us brothers, to be the Christmas Tree and the decorations were maintained until New Year which coincided with the annual festivity of our Parish Church. We used to decorate the tree with paper buntings, electric lights, and stars, all hand-made using bamboo and craft paper. The ritual of star-making began a fortnight before Christmas. We had to cut a reed-bamboo from our neighbour's farm, split it into thin veins and then assemble it to form five or six-cornered stars. The exercise led by our eldest brother often resulted in physical bouts when one of us four brothers disagreed about the methodology or sometimes unintentionally undo the work done. Whatever it was, it all ended up with the hoisting of the stars that we had painstakingly built, up onto the Guava Christmas Tree.

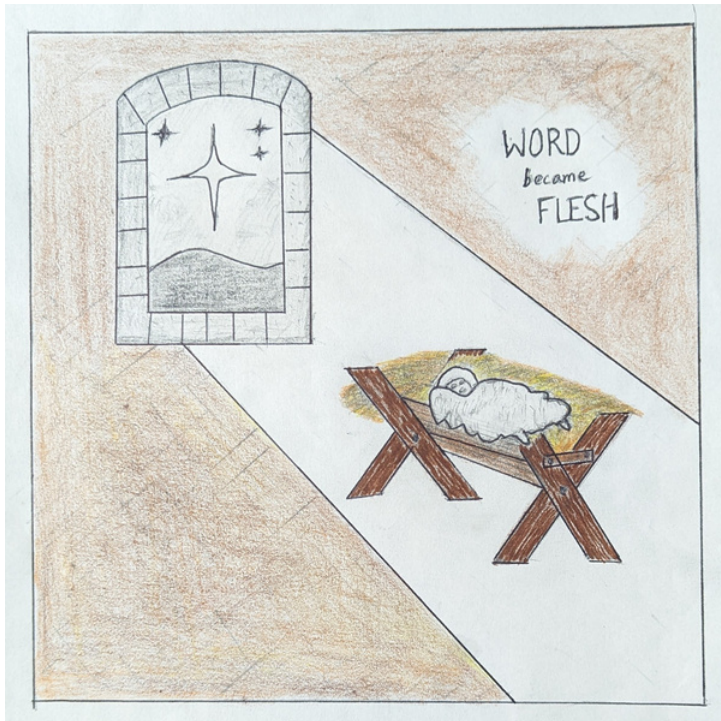
For the Christmas of 1976, after the guava tree was cut down, it was a Jamba tree in the vicinity that we chose to be blessed as our Christmas Tree. The Jamba tree in Malayalam is referred to as wax apple, love apple, java apple, chomphu (in Thai), bell fruit (In Taiwan), Jamaican apple, water apple, mountain apple, jamrul (in Bengali), jumbu (Sri Lanka) and jamalac in French. Being rich in fibre, they ease digestion and are mostly eaten with salt to give a better taste. The tree bears bell shaped pink fruits in early Winter. With the pink fruits on a green leafy tree making a striking contrast, the Jamba is ideally suited to be dressed up as a Christmas Tree.

This Jamba tree also witnessed many events of our growing up years. It must have been planted by Amma sometime in the mid-sixties. The tree being a slow grower, grew to about two feet by 1968. That was when our youngest brother, then aged four, came up with an unusual request. He wanted someone younger to him. It was all because he was invariably at the losing end of our many childhood fights. At the time our parents solved the problem by getting him a kid, a real goat's kid, a female one. Thus, began goat rearing at our home.

Word Became Flesh

This kid soon thereafter developed an immense liking for the leaves of the young Jamba tree. Our father tried every trick in his book to ensure the safety of the young tree. He fenced the area around the tree with thorny branches, but this kid easily managed to break through and reach the much sought-after leaves. He then sprayed the leaves with cow dung and cow's urine; come next rain, to be washed clean and the kid foraged on to it at the next opportune moment. Thus, the Jamba tree was cursed to be a stunted bonsai, but it was stubborn enough to manage a rudimentary existence in the front courtyard.

In 1974, the goats were sold off as we had shifted to rubber plantation from tapioca cultivation. This resulted in lack of forage and grass for the goats. This ensured 'Moksha' for the Jamba tree and it grew in leaps and bounds with a kind of pent-up vigour and in 1976 it was about ten feet tall, laden with the bell-shaped pink fruit by early December. With the guava tree cut, our eldest brother designated the Jamba tree to be the Christmas tree for the year. Fully decorated with all the pink fruits, it turned out to be the prettiest Christmas Tree that we ever had. As I pictured that decorated Christmas tree of 1976, I couldn't help being swept aside by a flood of nostalgia.



Drawing By:
Anish Mathew
(OCYM)

Christmas Tree

By: Christina Varghese (Grade 8, Sunday School)

As we all agree, a common tradition that we follow during Christmas time is putting up a Christmas tree. Decorating a Christmas tree can bring families closer, put a smile on peoples' faces and turn out to be an enjoyable activity. Yes, putting up and decorating a tree can be fun, and the outcome is usually amazing, but have we ever thought about how this tradition of putting up a tree and decorating it began? Is there a reason for Christians to follow this tradition? The answer to that question is 'yes'. There is a significant reason why we put up and decorate a tree during Christmas time.

The tradition of installing a tree leads back to the 16th century. Thinking about it, that was a while ago and the tradition still is extremely popular today. There are many things that just a Christmas tree symbolizes and means. One of the things being the type of tree it is. A Christmas tree is typically an evergreen tree which symbolizes eternal life. Let us think about it this way; all year round we see some type of greenery, but when winter hits, it all dies or is covered up by the snow. The only greenery that is seen even through the snow, are evergreen trees. This means that evergreens never fade away, thus explaining the concept of eternal life.

On the very top of the tree, we usually decorate it with a star or an angel. The star that is placed on the top of the tree resembles the north star that shined brightly all through the night that Jesus was born and helped lead the wise men to Jesus' birthplace. Angel can mean many things but one on the treetop mainly symbolizes the angel who is always watching over us from above. Decorating the tree with ornaments and lights also signifies a deep meaning.

We decorate the tree with glitters because of the "Paradise Tree" in the story of Adam and Eve. The paradise tree referred here is taken from the popular Medieval mystery play about Adam and Eve and it represented the garden of Eden. It was a fir tree hung with apples and similarly we do the same but with an ornamented evergreen tree. A Christmas tree is also decorated with lights which resemble Jesus as light in the dark. It assures that Jesus will always shine through even at the darkest of times. Way back in the day, they used candles to light up the trees and that represented the same concept - Christ as the light of the world.

The shape of the tree also conveys a significant meaning. Christmas trees are typically in a triangular shape, which symbolises the holy trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit).

Almost everything on the tree represents something, even the branches. The branches and leaves on the fir tree are viewed as the crown of thorns worn by Christ on the cross. Even the gifts placed under the tree represent the gift that Jesus gave to us - His glory, forgiveness, and love.

Natural trees were cut down and put up inside or outside of houses and this tradition still goes on. You can think of the process of setting up the tree like this: when the tree is cut down and put back up, it is similar to the death and rising of Jesus Christ. Just by this, we can see the true meaning and the deep history about something that got neglected. The next time we decorate a Christmas tree, let us not think about all the presents and gifts that will appear under it, but emphasize more on appreciating the deeper meaning and symbolism each part of the tree carries.



Drawing By:
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(Grade 7)



Drawing By:
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(Grade 2)

The History of the Christmas Tree

By: Jonath George and Johan George (Grade 5 and 7, Sunday School)

A Christmas tree is usually an evergreen conifer. The tradition of the Christmas tree originated in Germany with Saint Boniface. It was developed in modern day Germany where German protestant Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. It began to be popular during the second half of the 19th century. The Christmas tree was traditionally decorated with roses made of coloured paper such as apple, wafers, tinsel, and sweetmeats. Christians began to illuminate Christmas trees with candles. Today there are a variety of traditional and modern ornaments. Examples include garlands, baubles, tinsel, and candy canes. A star or angel might be on the top of the Christmas tree to represent Angel Gabriel or the Star of Bethlehem. Items such as gingerbread or chocolate and other sweets are popular and are tied from the tree's branches with ribbons.

In the Western Christian tradition, Christmas trees are decorated and put up on days such as the first day of Advent or even as late as Christmas Eve. They are taken down either on Twelfth night or on the Candlemas, which marks the end of the Christmas - Epiphany season for some denominations. The Christmas tree is sometimes compared with the Yule tree in discussions of its folkloric origins.



Drawing By:
Jonath George & Johan George
(Grade 5 and 7)

Christmas Tree

By: Shruta Maria Saju (Grade 5, Sunday School)

Usually, we see Christmas trees all over the world during Christmas time. The Christmas spirit makes everyone joyful during this season with Christmas trees at everyone's home. A Christmas tree is an evergreen tree, often a pine or a fir, decorated with lights, ornaments and garlands as a part of Christmas festivities.

The Christmas tree tradition originated in Germany. In Christianity, the Christmas tree symbolizes the birth of Jesus Christ. Ornaments on a tree is a way to honor Jesus Christ's birth. Every Christmas tree that is decorated, has a Christmas star at the top of the tree. The Christmas Star, also called the Star of Bethlehem, is a star in the Bible and Christian tradition that let the wise men know that Jesus was born, and later helped them go to Bethlehem.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, the star guided the wise men to Jerusalem. There they met King Herod of Judea and asked where the king of the Jews had been born. Herod's advisors said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. While the magi were going to Bethlehem, they saw the star again. The star stopped above the place where Jesus was born. There, the wise men saw Jesus with his mother, worshiped him and gave costly presents to him.

In the early days, people used to decorate the Christmas tree with food items such as gingerbread and apples. Over a period of time, the decorations include electric Christmas lights, candies, flashy stars, small dolls like Santa Claus, artificial snowflakes, and Christmas bells.

It is said that Santa Claus brings gifts for children on Christmas Eve and places the gifts under the Christmas tree. The Christmas tree is a nice place to gather around and unwrap the gifts. All the festivities cheer us up, however, here it is the gifts which are exchanged that bring out the element of surprise and amusement.

Let us celebrate this Christmas with love and joy, with family and friends, keeping Jesus Christ in our hearts.

Christmas Tree

By: Binta Joshua (Grade 7, Sunday School)

The installation of Christmas trees is a tradition practiced all over the world. Almost every single house may have a Christmas tree decorated to bring in the spirit of Nativity into their home. However not everyone may be aware of the history of the Christmas tree, why we put it up, or why we decorate it every single year.

The history of the Christmas tree dates back to almost 1400-1500 years. The Christmas tree was also known as Paradise Tree back then. In Northern Europe, this practice started about 1000 years ago.

Christmas trees are made of evergreen trees and are put up in winter. One might wonder why we decorate trees for Christmas. Back in the 16th century, Christians used to decorate the tree as a symbol of new life and a symbol of Christ. The star hung on the top of the tree symbolizes the star that the three wise men followed.

The evergreen trees take their place in winter because all the other trees lose their leaves, and only the evergreen trees remain. It never dies in the winter. The evergreen tree reminds of God's eternal love, no matter what the weather or what kind of condition it lives in. It always stays like God's eternal love.

Christmas is also a time when we all come together as family and as community, just like the Shepherds and the wise men came from different directions and met at one place to see the boy Jesus. Christmas is also about spending time with our family. We gather around to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. By decorating the Christmas Tree, and by joining hands during this time, it makes us all feel closer and connected to those whom we love, which can make life more meaningful and blessed.



Drawing By:
Johannah Chacko
(Grade 2)

Star of the East

By: Noah Anand Joseph (Grade 4, Sunday School)

What is a star? A star is a giant sphere of superhot gas. The sun we see is a star. Although a star is giant, we see it as tiny specks of light like a firefly because we are very far away from them. And though it is made of superhot gases, we see it as a tiny dot of light in the cool dark night sky.

Long ago, there were wise men who saw a star such as this and they started a journey that would not only change their lives but the whole world. They knew it was different and special and hence they followed it. I have wondered why only the three wise men saw the star and followed it.

Unlike the animals whose vision is only the grass and the path in front of them, God has blessed only us humans to stand upright, to be able to look up to Him. But we go back to the flesh like our animal friends and look only at our pleasures and worries. And unlike the priests and teachers of the law in Jerusalem who were too focused on their books and their laws, the wise men's magical journey was possible because they turned away from the world. They lifted their heads, looked around them into all of creation and ultimately looked up into the sky to find the special sign from God that would lead them on their journey to find the Eternal Star.

We too must remind ourselves to look around and *look up*. We must move our eyes, minds and hearts away from the pleasures and the troubles of this world. When we look around we can see the majesty of our Creator in all of creation. We can see how God uses a very unexpected part of His creation to announce the Good News just as He did with shepherds, the cattle and the Manger. Heaven and Earth and all of God's creation in the whole universe, glorifies God and joins in His plan of salvation. If we miss looking up to Him, we will definitely miss the wonders and the magic He has kept waiting for us which is beyond this world's ability. And looking around, also opens our eyes to help those in need.

Once they spotted the star, they took their next step; to follow it. That is what made them truly wise. They followed it without any doubt, to wherever it led them. They left their homeland and were willing to travel to an unknown place. They did not worry about the difficulty of the journey and kept their focus on the excitement of the discovery that awaited them.

Jesus, the Eternal Star, later teaches us that we should be wise too, not just smart. We must be willing and strong to follow the voice of the Spirit in our hearts. When we do that, God will continue to work on us, giving us the courage to do new things and the strength to do difficult things and the ability to do impossible things. This way He will bless us with renewed and refreshed spirit, to discover new, unimaginable experiences.

Word Became Flesh

So the Wise Men saw the star and decided to **follow** it. Was it as simple as following the star? We can see that the Wise Men had asked King Herod, the Jewish priests and teachers for direction and guidance. To reach their destination, they asked people who were not very godly, but still they reached their destination. In the same way, the world will have so many kinds of people and sources to take us away from the path of our divine purpose. We will be able to continue on that path, following the star, only if we obey and follow the word of God and the teachings of the church. We can be sure that we are journeying on the right path only if we take the guidance of the church and its teachings on the Word of God.

The Wise Men finally reached their destination; they found the Eternal Star, the Son of God. They were filled with joy to see their Lord take human form as a tiny baby. They gave him very precious unusual gifts. Just as them, when we look up, follow and obey, we find our Creator and it brings great joy, hope and peace. We can bring unto him not only our gifts and offerings but all our fears and worries. It is our relationship with the Lord that will help us find the true star, the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2), the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright and morning star (Revelation 22:16). And he will make us wise and help us shine like the brightness of the sky, like the stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:3).

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Drawing By:
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(Grade 7)

Christmas Tree

By: Niya Rose Shaiju (Grade 8, Sunday School)

Have we ever wondered why we always decorate Christmas trees and what it symbolizes? If we do not know, the historical facts and some ideas behind the tradition can be of benefit.

Evergreens has been a tradition ongoing from the late 1400s and since many Christians believed or used the evergreens as a symbol of everlasting life of God. As you know, the pine trees have always thrived in every single season. Just like that, it is telling us that God will always be there for us when we need him. Germany has been credited with starting the tradition of decorating the trees from the 15th century as some devoted Christians brought trees and decorated it or made pyramids and decorated it with evergreen and candles as it symbolizes birth, death, and resurrection. The first written record of a decorated Christmas Tree comes from Riga, Latvia.

For me, Christmas trees are among the most beautiful features of the seasonal decorations. One of my favorite traditions during Christmas is when people gather to sing, dance, and meet each other over the holiday to celebrate and give special and remarkable gifts to each other. Our relatives, friends, and families all come together over the weekend to decorate the house and trees for Christmas. We giggle, laugh, and spend the rest of the cheerful evening together making it unforgettable.

With the beautiful and colorful hanging decorations, our minds are so rejuvenated. In our family, Christmas is one of our favourite times of the year. It is always nice to get a break and spend time with our family and friends. Sometimes, people may miss Christmas celebrations due to busy work schedules or social restrictions in certain countries due to religious monoculture or too much secularism.

Let us make sure to spend a memorable and quality time with our loved ones because every Christmas can turn out to be one of the most special and beautiful moments.

Angels, Heralds of God
By: Sarah Susan Daniel (MGOCSM)

We, the children, use prayers as our medium of communication with our heavenly father and Angels assist us in receiving the messages that God intended for humans to know. Angels worship and adore God and keep praising Him day and night. They fulfill His will and Commandments while taking care of us believers, guarding, and rescuing us from our spiritual enemies. The Psalmist in Ps. 103:20, says, "Bless the Lord, O you His angels, you mighty ones, that do His Commandments, obeying the voice of His word." Further in Ps. 91:11-13, the Psalmist addresses the believers saying, "For He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." In Ezekiel 1:1-28 and Isaiah 6:2 the Bible brilliantly describes angels as winged creatures with human-like physical appearance and describes them as Cherubim and Seraphim.

Even though angels are mentioned multiple times in the Bible, there are only three angels mentioned by their name: Gabriel, Michael and the fallen angel Lucifer ("For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment" - 2 Peter 2:4), or Satan.

Angels appeared in many forms and conveyed God's messages to humans. One of the significant appearances of the angels is that of Gabriel to Daniel, the prophet, and proclaimed the coming of the Messiah (Daniel 8:16, 9:21). Five hundred years later, Gabriel appeared before Zechariah and gave him God's message about the birth of his son John, the Baptist. Gabriel appeared to Virgin Mary as well in Nazareth enunciating her of the divine conception by the Holy Spirit and of her giving birth to Lord Jesus. It was Gabriel who appeared to Joseph and instructed him to take the child and his mother Mary to flee to Egypt. The Bible has references of angels ministering to Lord Jesus multiple times in the wilderness, after his fasting, his temptation and strengthened him in the garden of Gethsemane before his passion. Michael is mentioned explicitly in Revelation 12:7-12, where he does battle with Satan and casts him out of heaven. Some angels were led into temptation and committed the sin of rebellion against God. Prophet Isaiah referred to the fall of evil angel Lucifer in the book of Isaiah 14:12-15.

Saint Basil the Great once said, "The [guardian] angel will not retreat from us, unless we drive him away by our evil deeds. As the smoke drives bees away, and stench the doves, even so our stinking sin drives away from us the angel who protects our life. According to St. Matthew 18:10 Jesus has taught " not to despise the little ones because in heaven their angels always see the face of God the Father ".

Word Became Flesh

Angels are living, intelligent, willful, and knowledgeable spirits. They serve God to fulfill His purpose and exalt Him. To the physical eyes, angels are invisible and without a body. They are not concerned with food, drink, clothing, shelter, or other bodily demands, desires, or passions. Angels serve God as His personal servants and with God's authority, they intervene into human life situations. They can also influence humans through the messages from God and help them to walk accordingly.

The existence and impact of angels are real, influencing individuals and groups in matters pertaining to social, political, and moral life. As mentioned earlier, they have no bodily needs or desires and passions, nor care about food, drink, clothes, or shelter. Angels focus on praising God and assisting God in carrying out His will and glorifying Him in everything they do. Humans could be influenced to lead a life in prayer, ministering, and trying to follow an angelic way of life. Angels have no worries about the future and no fear of death. Like them, humans should be free from worrying and fearing death, as everyone will eventually die. Like the Angels, humans are also immortal as their souls never die and hence physical death only gives them a chance to meet and join Jesus who is in heaven. There they can enjoy eternal life ever after. Though angels cannot be seen, by faith in God's Word, humans can sense that they are present and active in their lives to help, protect, provide, and strengthen them as they walk with the Lord. It is also believed that angels are active in the affairs of everyday life (Hebrews 1:14 "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?"), helping to advance God's purposes in a fallen world, thus being called the 'Heralds of God.'

Drawing By:
Lois Kuriakose
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Santa: Unraveling a Popular Christmas Myth

By: Shweta Maria Saju (MGOCSM)

Santa, also known as Father Christmas, the "Jolly Fat Man", and other names to some, is pretty important to people of many ages and walks of life. Whether we actually believe in Santa is not the matter. The questions most people don't have an answer to are: Who is Santa really? Where does he come from? Is there any truth behind him?

There are many questions that come to mind when considering Santa Claus. Let's take a look at some possible answers!

Santa is actually REAL. Not in the sense he is alive, rides reindeers, goes down chimneys, and drinks people's milk and eats their cookies. But in the sense that the myth is actually derived from somewhere, there is some truth behind the story.

So, who is Santa inspired by, then?

Santa Claus, a fictitious figure, was heavily influenced by Saint Nicholas, a real-life Christian saint and Greek Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor who lived in the fourth century and is today revered as the patron saint of children. Saint Nicholas was known for his practice of gift-giving in secret. The Dutch name for this figure, Sinterklaas, is where the term Santa Claus originated. The name Sinterklass is derived from Saint Nicholas, or Sint-Nicolaas.

How is Santa portrayed in common culture?

Santa Claus is typically portrayed as a large, cheerful, white-bearded man with spectacles who is dressed in a red coat with white fur collar and cuffs, red pants with white fur cuffs, a red hat with white fur, and black leather belt and boots. He also typically carries a bag filled with gifts for children. He often appears to laugh in a way that sounds like "ho ho ho."

Santa Claus is claimed to have a house and a workshop where he is said to make the gifts to give to good children at Christmas, frequently with the help of elves or other supernatural beings. According to certain myths and tales, his assistants live in a village that surrounds his house and business.

Santa Claus is believed to reside in the North Pole, which, according to Canada Post, is located within Canadian territory and has the postal code H0H 0H0 (a reference to Santa's catchphrase, "ho ho ho"). Anyways, even if Santa is a bit of a funny myth, he is a great way to grow in Christ.

Santa may, if perceived and conceived properly, help a youngster develop in faith, according to Christopher Fenoglio, who recently published a book to assist parents in negotiating with Santa as their children become older.

Myers, the creator of The St. Nicholas Center, said that the original St. Nicholas accomplished precisely that. She thinks that a nuanced portrayal of St. Nicholas steers kids away from the season's unrelenting materialism and toward a giving attitude.

This Christmas, millions of kids in the world are hoping for the presence of Santa. Let's try to reach out to them, help them grow in Christ, and preserve the hope and joy that comes with such a beautiful season of the year.



Drawing By:
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(Grade 2)



Drawing by:
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(Grade 6)

The History of Santa Claus

By: Sandra Shaji (MGOCSM)

As small kids, we all had the exciting feeling of coming home late at night from Christmas service, holding some expectation while in bed, awaiting the jolly old man in his famous red suit to pay us a visit. Hoping we are lucky enough to be in his nice list because as the popular song 'Santa Claus is coming to town' goes, he knows if you've been good or bad. He lives in the North pole with his elves and reindeer preparing for Christmas all year round, so we welcome him with cookies, milk, and carrots for his reindeer while he leaves presents under the tree.

We call him Santa Claus though to others he goes by Father Christmas or Kris Kringle, but who was he really? To find out, let's go back to the very first one. St. Nicholas of Myra – located in current-day Turkey- was a 3rd-century Bishop born to a Christian family of good status. Through his ministry, St. Nicholas administered advances in the Christian faith. There is a legend about him that he was present in the first ecumenical council of Nicaea.

St. Nicholas was a compassionate man who was known for his miracles, kindness to the children and helping those in need, and of course, giving gifts. It is believed that this originated when St. Nicholas heard of a poor family that did not have enough money to pay dowries for their daughters. So, in the middle of the night, St. Nicholas threw bags of gold through their chimney or window. As time went on, by the 12th-century nuns in France started leaving gifts for children and signing them from St. Nicholas.

Considering these historical aspects, we traditionally acknowledge St. Nicholas as the patron saint of children. How far do we know that he was also claimed as the patron saint of many groups, including sailors? This was because on his pilgrimage to the holy land, a frightening storm overcame the lot which caused one of the crew members to fall and die, however as St. Nicholas prayed over him, the storm calmed and the man came back to life. This is believed to be the first miracle performed by St. Nicholas.

He was adored by sailors so much that after his passing and burial in Myra, sailors took his bones to Bari, where they were enshrined in the Basilica di San Nicola. They only took his major bones as the monks of Myra objected to this. Today he is commonly recognized as their patron saint as St. Nicholas of Bari. But they were not done yet, as his remaining bones in Myra were taken by the Venetian sailors and brought to Venice. Even Christopher Columbus named the first harbor he encountered in Haiti 'Puerto de San Nicolas' upon his arrival.

The sailors likely played a large part in sharing stories of their patron saint across the world. However, each coast being unique to each other took a spin on the traditions, to finally have the versatility that we have today.

Such as in places like Brazil, Papai Noel wouldn't need his heavy fur coat, instead, he comes in fine silks and fills the children's shoes which they set outside with presents. Or all the way out in Norway, kids leave out bowls of porridge for their patron saint of seamen to eat. Alternatively, in Netherlands people wait for Sinterklaas, and for Noel baba in Turkey, since this was his hometown, common depictions of Noel Baba are that of a bishop!

However, an important thing to remember is that the real focus of Christmas is the birth of Christ! Use this time to look at the people before us and learn from them. Jesus said, "it is more blessed to give than to receive" [Acts 20:35] and that's what Saint Nicholas did.

For us, this may not always look like presents wrapped with shiny bows, instead, it may be in the form of time or energy to help someone in need. Whether that be at a food shelter or listening to a friend who's going through tough times. Nevertheless, it's the season of giving, and we use these amazing stories and traditions to celebrate and be joyful for the coming of our savior!!

Drawing By:
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JOY
TO THE
WORLD

God in Swaddling Clothes - Kenotic Love

By: Teena Rachel Paul (OCYM)

"This will be a sign for you, you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." (St. Luke 2:12). We may have heard the Christmas story year after year, assuming that swaddling clothes conveyed the poverty into which Jesus was born but instead it was his love towards humankind that he became fully human and voluntarily humbled himself to save the destiny of every human creature.

The first bed for the son of God was not the royal cradle, maybe a common corn crib. It could be assumed that God had planned everything from choosing Joseph and Mary, who lived far away in Nazareth and not in Bethlehem. He planned for Mary to get pregnant far from the prophesied town and also moved Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem by means of an empire-wide census. No other king anywhere in the world was lying in a feeding trough. The manger was a sign of selfless love through which God sent his only son to this world to save humankind. Jesus' swaddling clothes were not a mark of poverty, instead they were a mark of the commonness of his newborn humanity. God himself embodied the same frailty and helplessness every single one of us did at birth.

Kenosis is about making oneself nothing, without content, without ego-centric purpose. It's a fundamental stepping-stone for Christianity. (Philippians 2: 6-7 "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men"). We believe that it is through *kenosis* that we fully highlight the intention for creation to give off ourselves for another for no other reason than 'love' called or compelled us to do so. It is to love others as we love ourselves. Doing so requires us to step outside of ourselves, to set our ego aside; to allow love to surge within us so greatly that thinking about our actions comes secondary to the act itself. Jesus divests himself, his entire concentration of being, which includes the part of the psyche that guides our thoughts, the ego so that we could all be saved.

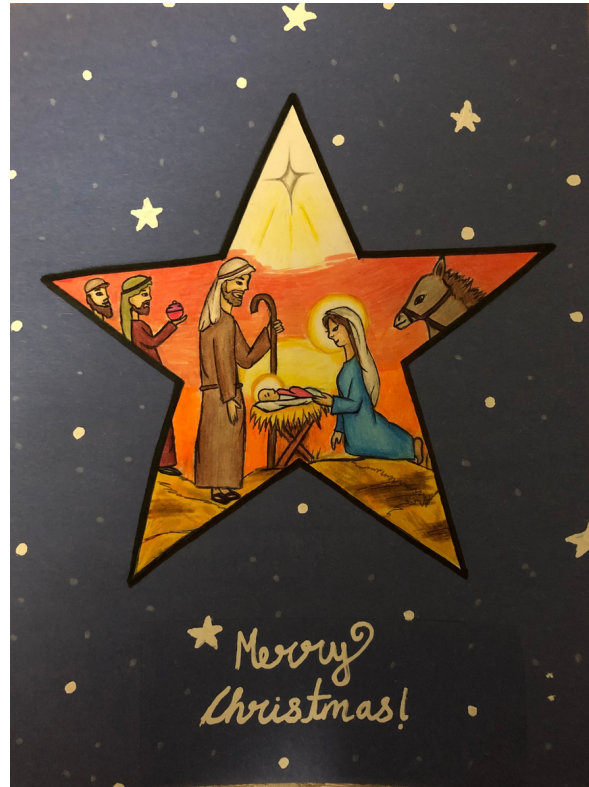
The term kenotic love means Christ emptied himself of all glory and power to become receptive to God's divine will. The 'Human God' inspires and challenges us to practice how He emptied himself on our behalf, and also demands our response. Christ calls us to be participants in His model of self-emptying love.

The kingdom of God is predicated on followers of 'The Way' bearing witness to the work of Christ in their lives. We can be certain that when we profess Jesus as Lord, we are professing our desire to live unto his will and way in the world.

Word Became Flesh

As St Paul suggests (Philippians 2:5), may we all have the same self-emptying mind of Christ. Let us hope that through this theme, discussions and learning, we would be inspired to empty ourselves and allow God's love and grace to fill our lives.

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Paradoxical Messiah

By: Bincy Chacko (OCYM)

The beauty of life is enveloped in the many paradoxes it arrives with. Be it *our* life on earth or our Lord, Jesus Christ's. To understand this stance, let us understand the etymology or origin of the word. The word 'paradox' is derived from Greek words: '*para*', which means contrary or opposed, and '*doxos*', which means opinion. The Oxford dictionary meaning of 'paradox' defines it as "*a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true.*"

If we think about it, we may have grown up on familiar paradoxical adages or proverbs like 'Change is the only constant', 'slow and steady wins the race', 'opposites attract', or 'actions speak louder than words'. Let us try recollecting the first time we heard or read these proverbs. Our first instinct may have been to question it or even counter it. However, experience and wisdom propel us towards accepting and believing in them.

Personally speaking, I realize the existence of such paradoxes in my life as a fairly recent immigrant to Canada. Uprooting oneself from the comfort of one's motherland, away from the warmth of a multitude of relations, leaving the seniority and comfort in one's career, these paradoxes wrapped in proverbs somehow offer relief! First, surviving and then thriving in this country that we now call home was possible as my family and I believed that 'Faith moves mountains'. And in the same context, this paradox also holds true: "We don't appreciate what we have until it's gone!"

When we reflect on the life of Jesus Christ, paradoxes have been a part and parcel of His life. Right from the prophecies of the Old Testament, He has been hailed as the Messiah or 'the anointed one'. For generations of people henceforth, this term had been associated with a variety of figures like a redeemer, a priest, a warrior, and a king. Following the birth of Jesus, the paradoxes started making more sense. The Messiah who had been awaited for generations was born, not in the most lavish palace but in a humble manger. Hailing from the family of King David, He was most unlike a worldly king, who made Himself inclusive, not exclusive.

As Jesus grew in years, and wisdom, He kept building His ministry as a master teacher. He was often seen teaching in paradoxes. In response to the request of James and John that at His time of glory, He should appoint the two brothers at His left and right.

It is then that Jesus responds, "... Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be a slave of all." (St. Mark 10: 43-44)

We also see that on being asked by the Pharisees, what should they be expected to do when the Kingdom of God comes, Jesus replies, "Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it." (St. Luke 17:33)

It must have been difficult for the Jewish people, including His disciples to accept the concept of a 'suffering Messiah'. So, even though this 'redeemer' ultimately was humiliated, beaten, and crucified, He came to save us with a promise of eternal life. In conclusion, the next time we come across some paradoxes in our lives, let us try to embrace them as our Lord too was one with them.

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Paradoxical Messiah

By: Oleena Thomas (OCYM)

"Paradox is a term used for two entities that appear to be either contradictory or in some sense mutually exclusive. The disconnect is apparent. In the life of the Messiah, we can see paradoxes. The birth of Jesus in the Scriptures represents a turning point in history.

In Isaiah 11, the arrival of the Messiah is described as the coming of the rod out of the stem of David. The book says that, in the coming of the 'One' there will be a renewal in which the existing order of creation and of the world will be altered. Son of David will bring in and call together all the nations. There will be peace and renewal expected with the coming of God Himself. The announcement of the coming of the Messiah in the Gospel accounts of St Matthew and St Luke- the angel speaking to Joseph in dream, the angel appearing to Mary, Zechariah's benediction- all speak of the same basic theme. He has come to bring redemption, forgiveness, to remind the covenant between God the Father and His children, to establish David's house, to reinstate the throne and kingdom and to set the Heavenly King over the kingdom forever. This was how the coming of the Messiah was outlined.

These ideas set forth by the Prophets were the hope of Israel. From the very outset, the whole Christ events- right from the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary all the way through to His ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit- was characterized by the mighty, triumphant work of God. And yet in a very unexpected way. When Jesus was born, the sky was lit up at night. Angels sang Glory to God in the Highest. Christ, the King was born in Bethlehem, in an insignificant way in a manger. We can see the same idea of paradox continuing in Jesus' childhood. At the age of 12, He was in the temple asking questions, reasoning with the teachers, and amazing them. When His parents asked Him what you have been doing He replied "Don't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" (St. Luke 2:49). They could not comprehend what He was saying. According to St Luke then He went with His parents back to Nazareth and remained in subjection to them as every other child. He grew in wisdom and stature as a boy, like other kids, however, there was something more and extraordinary than what other kids had.

A great portrait of the Messiah in the Old Testament is in Isaiah 53- a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, pains, and diseases of others. And yet Jesus assured His disciples to give His joy. The One who was defined by sorrows and griefs possessed transcendent joy. He said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."(St. John 14:27)

The assessment of Jesus by His generation was that they saw Him as a sinner and a friend of sinners. He enjoyed dining with publicans and changed water into wine at a wedding. He did not keep Himself holy according to their standards. He made wild claims about His relationship with God which was looked at as heresy or blasphemy without having any special manifestations to support his claims. They did not know what to make out of what they saw or how to connect with the presentation as the Messiah

Peter, being a disciple, had to rebuke Jesus after getting confused with the foretelling of Jesus about his suffering and death, that how a soon-to-be-crucified Messiah could begin a kingdom. He expected the Messiah as one with authority, power, and a visible kingdom. The Messiah should set things right for Israel and rule the people setting his throne at Jerusalem as King David did. Peter could not accept Jesus' plan and he considered it as a disaster. John the Baptist questioned the ministry of Jesus. According to Matthew, John the Baptist, while in prison, sent messengers to Jesus asking, "Are you he who comes, or should we be looking for another?" (St. Mt. 11:3). As Jesus' ministry did not match his expectations, John needed the assurance that Jesus was indeed the expected Messiah

In the Kingdom as suggested by Jesus, the king and master would be the servant to all. The concepts of power, authority and the Kingdom were way different than that of the world. While the disciples were arguing over who was the greatest among them, Jesus took the place of the lowest servant and washed the feet of His disciples. Peter objected as that was considered demeaning. Any sort of weakness was despicable. Jesus made His final entry to Jerusalem on a colt signifying the entry in humility contrasting a conquering king on a powerful horse. He predicted the destruction of the temple, which was the place of all their pride and claims, and it was too much for them to stand. In the trials Jesus was charged for claiming that He would rebuild the temple in three days. There was nothing in the Scriptures about the Messiah tearing down the temple. When He was asked about His claim to be the Son of God, He replied that they would see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory. The Kingdom which Jesus established was marked by paradoxes.

Authority and power in God's Kingdom are means to serve the people. Jesus gave the power to His disciples to serve the people, giving out without acquiring anything in return. God has chosen the weak to confound the strong, the foolish to confound the wise, the lowest to confound the esteemed. Here we could see the paradox. If the Kingdom is about triumph and victory,

in the kingdom of Christ, a share in the divine triumph means subjection and apparent defeat. Divine power is manifested, and divine triumph is secured through the weakness and humiliation of self-giving love. It was this way Jesus manifested the truth of his Lordship. The worst humiliation that could come to anyone was crucifixion at that time. Over Jesus' head was a placard with inscription 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews'. The rulers were furious and took that down as they believed that the king would be a man of power, conquers with an army, and establishes a kingdom. Such a self-humiliating, self-giving suffering and death was never manifested in the lives of kings or rulers in the past. What was inscribed on the cross was not digestible to the people. Here was a king who had to fight the decisive battle through the establishment of forgiveness and covenant renewal for the regathering of the lost creation.

We believe in sensational, spectacular, and wonderful outcomes as the signs of triumph. To bear Christ's fragrance, we should have fellowship in His life, sufferings and struggles according to St Paul (2 Cor 2:15, Philippians 2:10). In reality, there is no paradox at all. It's the lack of divine perception that we find God's words paradoxical. To be 'Messianic' means rejection, suffering, death, resurrection, and glory acquired through sacrifice and pain. Let's work together for reconciliation, forgiveness and self-emptying for establishing God's love. We could pray together; O Lord, "All Your words are true; all Your righteous laws are eternal" (Psa. 119:160). Teach us to have complete trust in You, Amen.

Drawing By:
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(Grade 8)



Advent: Preparing for Him

By: Reeba Thomas (MMVS)

The ADVENT is a period of prayer, repentance, and fasting in preparation for Christmas. The word stems from the Latin word for "coming"; during the fast the faithful prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas.

The Advent Season is a good period for us to retrospect and introspect. Retrospect to see how far we have come in this world and measure the goodness & mercy that have been showered on us. Introspect to see whether our journey has been guided by the principles laid down by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a time for faith communities and families to remember, through prayer, reflections, special music, and good deeds what the true meaning of Jesus' birth is.

Often in corporate parlance, there is something called gap analysis which measures the gap between said objectives of the organization and the existing situation. Have we ever done a spiritual gap analysis for ourselves and seen where we are lacking? A clear understanding and open heart will help to bridge the spiritual deficiencies within us and make us closer to God.

In Romans 12:2, we have been told to renew ourselves by the renewal of our mind. This is in true sense a transformation and preparation for The Advent of Christ.



Drawing By:
Santosh Varughese
(OCYM)

മറിയവും കുഞ്ഞും - വെല്ലുവിളികളുടെ ലോകത്ത്

By: Tintu Thankom Koshy (MMVS)

വിശുദ്ധ വേദപുസ്തക അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിൽ വെല്ലുവിളികളിൽ കൂടി കടന്നു പോയവരെക്കുറിച്ചു ചിന്തിക്കുമ്പോൾ ആദ്യം തെളിഞ്ഞു വരുന്നത് വിശുദ്ധ ദൈവമാതാവിന്റെ മുഖമാണ്. വളരെ ചെറിയ പ്രായത്തിൽ തന്നെ ദൈവപുത്രനെ ഉദരത്തിൽ വഹിക്കുവാനുള്ള കൃപ ലഭിച്ചവൾ. പക്ഷെ ആ ദൈവകൃപ മറിയാമിന് സമ്മാനിച്ചത് തുടർന്ന് വരുവാനുള്ള പരീക്ഷണങ്ങൾ സഹിക്കുവാനുള്ള ശക്തിയാണ്.

ഗബ്രിയേൽ മാലാഖ മറിയാമിന്റെ അടുത്തെത്തി സദ്യർത്തമാനം അറിയിച്ചപ്പോൾ അതിനെ ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുവാനും തന്റെ ജീവിതം അതിനായി സമർപ്പിക്കുവാനുമുള്ള ദൈവിക ജ്ഞാനം അവൾക്കുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. സ്വയം കർത്താവിന്റെ ദാസിയായി വിനയപ്പെടുവാൻ അവൾക്കു കഴിഞ്ഞു. മറിയാമിന്റെ ഏറ്റവും വലിയ പ്രത്യേകത അവളുടെ താഴ്മയായിരുന്നു. മറിയാമിന്റെ പാട്ടിൽ ഇങ്ങനെ പറയുന്നു: "അവൻ തന്റെ ദാസിയുടെ താഴ്ച കടാക്ഷിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു, ഇന്നു മുതൽ എല്ലാ തലമുറകളും എന്നെ ഭാഗ്യവതി എന്ന് വാഴ്ത്തും".

പക്ഷെ മറിയാമിനു അറിയാം ഈ ലോകത്തിനു മുമ്പിൽ നിന്ദാപാത്രം ആകാവുന്ന ഒരു യാഥാർഥ്യം ആണ് തന്റെ ജീവിതത്തിൽ സംഭവിക്കാൻ പോകുന്നതെന്ന്. താൻ സമൂഹത്തിനു മുമ്പിൽ അപഹസിക്കപ്പെടും എന്ന ചിന്ത ആയിരുന്നു മറിയാം നേരിട്ട ആദ്യത്തെ വെല്ലുവിളി.

ലോകാധിപതിയെ പ്രസവിക്കാൻ ഉചിതമായ ഒരു സ്ഥലം ലഭിക്കാഞ്ഞതാണ് മറിയാം തുടർന്ന് നേരിട്ട വെല്ലുവിളി. ഓരോ സത്രങ്ങളുടെ വാതിൽക്കൽ മുട്ടുമ്പോഴും തിരസ്കരിക്കപ്പെടുമ്പോഴും മാതാവ് വലിയ വെല്ലുവിളിയെയാണ് അതിജീവിച്ചത്.

ഹെരോദാവിന്റെ ശിശുഹത്യക്കുള്ള ഉത്തരവിൽ നിന്നും മിശിഹായെ രക്ഷിക്കുക എന്നതായിരുന്നു അടുത്ത വെല്ലുവിളി. അതിനായി മറിയവും യോസേഫ്ഉം യേശുക്കുഞ്ഞുമായി മിസ്രയീമിലേക്കു പലായനം ചെയ്തു.

പെരുന്നാൾ സമയത്തു ദൈവാലയത്തിൽ വെച്ച് നഷ്ടപ്പെട്ട മകനെ എങ്ങനെ കണ്ടെത്തും എന്നത് മറ്റൊരു വെല്ലുവിളിയായിരുന്നു. അതിനായി മാതാവ് ദീർഘദൂരം സഞ്ചരിച്ചു ആശങ്കയോടെ ദൈവാലയത്തിലേക്കു മടങ്ങി വരുന്നു. ഈ ഘട്ടങ്ങളിൽ എല്ലാം പിതാവാം ദൈവത്തിന്റെ അദ്യശ്യമായ ആശ്വാസത്തിന്റെ കരങ്ങൾ വിശുദ്ധ മാതാവിനെ സാന്ത്വനിപ്പിക്കുന്നുണ്ട്.

യേശു ദൈവപുത്രനാണെന്നു ലോകത്തിനു കാണിച്ചു കൊടുക്കേണ്ട ഉത്തരവാദിത്വം തന്നിൽ നിക്ഷിപ്തമാണെന്നു ബോധ്യമുള്ള മാതാവ്, കാനാവിലെ കല്യാണവിരുന്നു ആതിനായി തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്തു. പുത്രന്റെ ദൈവത്വം വെളിവാക്കാൻ പോകുന്ന ആ നിമിഷത്തിൽ മാതാവ് വലിയ മാനസിക സംഘർഷവും വെല്ലുവിളിയും നേരിട്ടു. എങ്കിലും ദൈവത്തിലുള്ള ഉറച്ച വിശ്വാസം മൂലമാണ് "അവൻ നിങ്ങളോടു എന്തെങ്കിലും കല്പിച്ചാൽ അത് ചെയ്വിൻ" എന്ന് ശുശ്രൂഷക്കാരോടു പറയുന്നത്.

യെരൂശലേം ദൈവാലയത്തിൽ വെച്ച് ശിമയോൻ പ്രവചിച്ചതുപോലെ തന്റെ പ്രാണനിൽ കൂടി ഒരു വാൾ കടക്കും എന്ന് മാതാവിന് ബോധ്യം ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നു. കാൽവരിയിലേക്കു തന്റെ മകൻ വലിയ മരക്കുരിശും ചുമന്നു, നിന്ദയും അടിയും പരിഹാസവും ഏറ്റുവാങ്ങി നടന്നു നീങ്ങുന്നത് കാണുമ്പോൾ ഏതൊരു മാതാവും നേരിടുന്ന വെല്ലുവിളി മറിയാമു. ഒട്ടും കുറയാതെ അനുഭവിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്, പക്ഷേ ഇതെല്ലാം സഹിക്കാനുള്ള ശക്തി ദൈവകൃപയാൽ ആണ് മറിയാമിനു ലഭിച്ചത്. ഇതോടൊപ്പം തന്നെ, നമ്മുടെ കർത്താവും ഈ ലോകജീവിത കാലത്തു ധാരാളം വെല്ലുവിളികൾ നേരിട്ടിട്ടുണ്ട്. യെരൂശലേം ദൈവാലയത്തിൽ വെച്ച് ന്യായശാസ്ത്രീമാരുടെ കുഴയ്ക്കുന്ന ചോദ്യങ്ങളും, യോസേഫ് പിതാവിനോടൊപ്പം ചെയ്ത തച്ചന്റെ ജോലിയും, സാധാരണ മനുഷ്യജീവിതത്തിൽ നേരിടേണ്ടി വന്നതുമായ വെല്ലുവിളികൾ, യൂദാ ഒറ്റിക്കൊടുത്തപ്പോഴും പത്രോസ് തള്ളിപ്പറഞ്ഞപ്പോഴും അനുഭവിച്ച വെല്ലുവിളികൾ, ന്യായാധിപന്മാരുടെയും മഹാപുരോഹിതന്മാരുടെയും വിചാരണകൾ, പൂർണ്ണ മനുഷ്യനായ കർത്താവു ക്രൂശമരണവേളയിൽ അനുഭവിച്ച അതിവേദനകൾ, എന്നിങ്ങനെ ദൈവപുത്രൻ ആയിരുന്നിട്ടും നമ്മുടെ കർത്താവും ധാരാളം വെല്ലുവിളികൾ നേരിട്ടു. നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതത്തിലും വളരെയധികം വെല്ലുവിളികൾ നമുക്കു നേരിടേണ്ടതായി വരും. ചിലപ്പോഴൊക്കെ നമ്മൾ അതിന്റെ ഭവിഷ്യത്തുകളെക്കുറിച്ചു ചിന്തിച്ചു അതിൽനിന്ന് ഓടിയൊളിക്കാൻ ശ്രമിക്കും. പക്ഷേ, ആ വെല്ലുവിളികൾ ദൈവിക പദ്ധതിയുടെ ഭാഗമാണെങ്കിൽ, നമുക്കു ഒഴിഞ്ഞുമാറാൻ സാധിക്കയില്ല, നമ്മൾ അത് ഏറ്റെടുക്കേണ്ടതായി വരും. ഒരിക്കലും സാധ്യമെന്നു നമ്മൾ വിചാരിക്കാത്ത വലിയ കാര്യങ്ങൾ ദൈവം നിസ്സാരന്മാരായ നമ്മിൽക്കൂടി പ്രവർത്തിക്കും. അതുകൊണ്ടു വെല്ലുവിളികളുടെ മുമ്പിൽ തളരാതെ, അത് ദൈവം നമുക്കുവേണ്ടി ഒരുക്കിയതാണെന്നുള്ള തിരിച്ചറിവോടെ, മുന്നോട്ടു ജീവിക്കാൻ ദൈവാത്മാവ് നമ്മെ സഹായിക്കട്ടെ.

Drawing By:
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Reflections of Christmas Then and Now

By: Omana John (Seniors Forum)

Jesus is the reason for the Christmas season, this is what Christmas is all about. Christmas is about celebrating the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save us all from our sins. Christmas has always been a time of family gatherings, and visiting grandparents, cousins, brothers, and sisters. No matter when and where we celebrate Christmas, it is a time of happiness, joy, and love among families, friends, and communities.

Reflecting on my first 16 years in Kerala, I remember everything being scarce, from constant electricity blackouts, and no access to televisions or telephones. Being creative and self-sufficient in the early days was the only way to survive. Growing up in my household my parents encouraged us to read the Bible, complete our morning and evening prayers, observe Lents throughout the year and attend service every Sunday along with Sunday School.

We did this wholeheartedly and willingly as it was when we got to spend the most time together as a family. Our church was about ten kilometers away from our house. We all walked to church with a small lantern and on this journey, many other families joined us. This was a great feeling of togetherness. We would reach the Church just before the service started. The 'theejwala' and the Christmas service, both reminded me of the re-enactment of the whole real events that happened in Bethlehem when Christ was born.

Christmas caroling in those times was only done by men and they would have to walk for kilometers on the unlit roads to the houses they were visiting. Regardless of religious beliefs, every house was visited by the carolers, and they were welcomed by all with monetary contributions, hot black coffee, and 'kappa puzhukku.' A few houses even welcomed them with small firecrackers. They would sing many Christmas songs while playing the drums and loudly proclaim the birth of Jesus Christ. It was a happy and joyful time; however, the true meaning of Christmas was not fully experienced until participating in the Christmas service.

For many years, our family did not have a Christmas tree. One of my fondest memories is cutting out a bamboo tree and decorating it with balloons and coloured paper in later years. There were no Christmas decorations in the market. So, we would make stars from small tree branches by tying them in the shape of a star. We would also make homemade glue by grinding cooked rice to paste the coloured papers on the star.

Sometimes we would place a lit candle inside the star and sometimes it would catch fire. Another fondest memory was anxiously waiting for the mailman to deliver two cards, one from my uncle and one from my penpal in America. We used to put the cards on a string and tie it on our doorway. During those times there were no exchanges of gifts as we have today.

On Christmas day the whole neighborhood would be full of various smells of cooking elaborate meals for the day. We would have appam and egg curry for breakfast, beef curry for lunch and our meals on that day turned out to be a huge celebration

My first Christmas away from home was in 1972, 4 months after I moved to America with my uncle and his family. It was so magical to see the fluffy snow everywhere. For the sight, I was surrounded by beauty at every turn. But when I had to go outside in the snow it was not so magical as it was freezing cold, and I would often slip on the ice and fall in the snow. The first actual Christmas tree that I ever saw was here at my uncle's house, bought straight from the farm and decorated from the top to bottom with ornaments and Christmas lights. It was topped with a beautiful star and placed in view by the window, so onlookers could see while they walked by. One of their family traditions was to gather together, listen to Christmas music and decorate the Christmas tree while aunty made hot chocolate for everyone. Aunty would buy so many Christmas gifts for everyone. On Christmas day we attended Christmas Service at the local church as there were no Malayalee churches around and it was a little bit difficult for me to comprehend due to the language barrier. We would then come home and open gifts with families along with a few international students that my uncle had invited over for Christmas dinner.

After I got married and had children, we followed similar traditions of putting up the Christmas tree, sending out Christmas cards, receiving gifts and enjoying time together as family. We would bring Christmas Stars back home from Kerala and have a piece of home back with us in Canada. We would all go caroling together on a school bus from house to house and enjoy the festivities weeks before the Christmas service. After our children went off to university, got married and had children, it had become a different feeling watching our daughter creating traditions of her own with her family. It was so wonderful. From making stars out of sticks with her daughter, hanging them up on the tree, watching the magic of Christmas in my granddaughter's eyes, all these experiences of Christmas have become irreplaceable. Throughout all these years, the memories that stay with me the most are the moments spent together with family and friends. This is the true essence of the Christmas season. No matter where we live, what age we are at or which era we live in, the most important aspect of Christmas is spending time with family and friends and celebrating the birth of Christ.

Wishing Everyone a Blessed Christmas.

Simeon & Anna

By: Babu John (Seniors Forum)

This season is the celebration of Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christmas is the celebration of love, hope and the purpose of our lives. On Christmas we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ through the liturgical service in a celestial way. Here, through 'Urava', we narrate the birth of Jesus with our literary attempt. In both ways, our journey is to meet and glorify baby Jesus in a manger and proclaim to the world his peace, mercy and joy to the people.

The presentation day of Jesus at the temple was a remarkable day for Mary and Joseph. To fulfill the requirement of the Law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple. There they met two elderly people, Simeon and Anna. Here we can see them witnessing the presentation of Jesus at the temple.

We have the practice of witnessing the sacrament of marriage by two people in our church through signing in the register. Mary and Elizabeth met together, and they witnessed the almighty God's miraculous grace revealed through the conception of the son of God Jesus Christ and his forerunner John the Baptist. As Mary greeted her, Elizabeth was filled with the holy spirit and blessed the Mother of God.

Simeon and Anna, both were waiting to see Christ the savior of Israelites. Their love of God and unceasing prayer led to fruition. According to the biblical account, Simeon was righteous and devout; he was looking for the consolation of Israelites. The Holy Spirit revealed that he would not see death before he saw the Savior Lord Jesus Christ. According to the Gospel of Luke, Anna was an elderly woman of the Tribe of Asher and lived at the temple waiting for the fulfillment of prophecy.

Simeon and Anna spent their lives in prayer and fasting with the hope that they would see Jesus. These two people are closely connected to the feast of Nativity. The two elderly faithful temple devotees met the younger faithful couple, Mary and Joseph shortly after the birth of Christ, on the day of presentation at the temple. They blessed Mary and Joseph.

Simeon and Anna patiently waited for the fulfillment of prophecy, and they were granted the opportunity to meet the Saviour. Anna spent her entire life in fasting and prayer. She was full of hope and purpose.

These two people were waiting to see the goodness of God. The Holy spirit led these people to meet Jesus at the temple. They accomplished the purpose and found the meaning of their lives at the Temple in the presence of Jesus while declaring his Messianic role. They rejoiced with Baby Jesus at the temple and eye witnessed the divinity of God. Simeon recognized the Son of God.

God's grace was upon these people, so they saw Jesus. God blessed them. God accepted their prayers and answered, though after a long wait.

Anna was the first person who went out and proclaimed the good news to the people that the Messiah was there with them to assure salvation to the world.

We see Baby Jesus in a Manger on Christmas day and continue to see Him all the days of our lives. May the Grace of the Lord be with us now and always.

Drawing By:
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Drawing By:
Diya Mary Shibu
(Grade 6)

Simeon & Anna

By: Aleyamma George (Seniors Forum)

Jesus was born of a young unwedded woman by the name of Mary by the Holy Spirit. The plan of His heavenly Father was that Jesus should be born as a human being to save all mankind in this world. At the same time, He was God too. In St. Luke Chapter 2 we read about three rituals connected with the birth of Jesus.

1. Circumcision of Jesus took place when he was eight days old
2. The purification of Mary took place when Jesus was forty days old.
3. The dedication of Jesus took place at the Temple of Jerusalem when he was forty days old.

Since Jesus was born sinless, these rites were not necessary for Him. But Joseph and Mary aimed to live in perfect submission to the will of God and they always sought to honour the Lord. They were very careful to show that Jesus was brought up in strict accordance with the Law.

At the temple, baby Jesus was routinely received by the priests, without being aware who He was. There were two elderly saints at the temple. They knew who He was. They lovingly welcomed Him, the Messiah of Israel. They were Simeon, a devout old man and Anna, the Prophetess.

We can see:

1. Simeon gets to see the Messiah and delivers prophecies.
2. Anna, the elderly prophetess gives thanks for the Christ child.

Simeon: He was a just and devout man, respectful to others and revered God. It was to him the Holy Spirit had revealed that before he died, he would see the anointed Christ, the Messiah (Luke 2: 26). At the time of Jesus' birth, the land of Israel was occupied by Roman armies and the city was ruled locally by the cruel king Herod. Scribes and Pharisees had only skin-deep spirituality and Sadducees were leaders too worldly-minded. **However, during darkness and despair, God always had devout followers.** Simeon and Anna were two of such devout followers. They eagerly waited with faith, hope and prayer for the Messiah to come and rescue the people. They believed the promise that Messiah would comfort His people (Isaiah 49: 13).

All of us should learn some lessons from these godly older man Simeon and the pious older woman Anna. About Simeon, he sensed a divine impulse to go to the temple on the precise day and hour that Mary and Joseph would bring baby Jesus. When Simeon saw baby Jesus, he took him in his arms and blessed him. He sensed that the child was the Messiah and offered praises to God.

Then he said, "mine eyes have seen the Messiah, who will bring salvation for Israel, let me depart in peace." The people were waiting for the real Messiah to come and to bring liberation for Israel and deliver them from bondage. Jesus was born and lived among the people of faith, but they could not acknowledge Him.

The salvation which Jesus would bring is two-fold:

- Salvation is a light – the gentiles living in darkness and ignorance needed light. Jesus revealed the true knowledge of God to the gentiles. He showed them the way to eternal life.
- Salvation is a glory- the people living in humiliation and reproach and under the bondage to the pagan Roman armies needed a glorious triumph against their oppressors. Jesus came as a liberator to bring them back their past glory. **Jesus would bring light and glory to all people. His presence really manifested the presence of God.**

After Simeon had uttered the song of praises, he said to Mary "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel (Luke 2:34). Simeon also said that Jesus was a sign which shall be spoken against. Even a casual reading of the Scripture by Jesus was slandered by his own people. Another statement made by Simeon to Mary that a sword shall pierce through her soul. Sorrow and joy would come to Mary through her living with this unusual child. This baby would be the suffering and dying Messiah. Simeon looked across decades of time and pictured Jesus hanging on the cross for the sins of people. The "sword" which Mary would experience was the pain of seeing her son die. The grief that would flood Mary's heart when she witnesses the crucifixion (John 19:25). Simeon's prophecy concluded by declaring that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed because some will accept, and others will reject Christ as the savior.

Anna- She was the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher from Galilee. According to history she was married for seven years, then her husband died and lived as a widow for the rest of her life. She was a woman of great denial and living in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' birth. Anna was in the courtyard day and night worshipping God through fasting and praying and was longing for the redemption promised through the Messiah. **Age did not stop her from serving the Lord, doing what is expected of a true follower, interceding for others. Anna was an evangelist who spoke of Christ child to all those who looked for redemption for Israel, proclaiming that the Messiah had come, and she saw Him.**

Simeon is an example of how a believer can be delivered from fear of death. Once he saw the Messiah, Simeon was ready to be released from his earthly life. There is no greater calamity than to face life's sunset years without Christ and His Salvation. Let us acknowledge our condition before God, invite Jesus into our hearts. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (St. John 6:37).

Most of us have experienced times of sadness, and where to look for peace, but Christmas time reminds us that the coming of Jesus is the Good News. The angel who announced his birth said, "I bring you good tidings of great joy."

To know Him is to have eternal life

To believe in Him is the greatest of all decisions

To follow Him is the noblest of all duties.

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Singing Together in Reconciliation

By: Jeffin Tom Jacob (Choir)

There are many instances in the Bible that depict reconciliation, such as the story of Joseph in the Old Testament and the parable of the prodigal son in the gospel of St. Luke. The definition of reconciliation through Christianity means transforming from a state of separation, hurt, and brokenness to one of healing, wholeness, forgiveness, and reunion. There are times when we push God away from our lives and follow worldly pleasures, but God always waits for our return.

The first step to reconciliation is reconciling with our fellow beings and forgiving them. The Bible says, "Watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them, and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive them." (St. Luke 17:3-4). Singing together in reconciliation is a process that brings people from various cultural backgrounds to togetherness. The Bible gives the example of the story of Joshua delivering the Israelites to the promised land through Jericho, wherein God gave specific instructions to him to gather the army and the priests to march around the wall with trumpets. On the seventh day the wall collapsed. This reveals how God promised to deliver the Israelites to the promised land when there was no hope in their lives while they were slaves under Pharaoh. Furthermore, if we look closely, we can see that Joshua gathered people from various strata of life for the march, from priests to army men, in order to demolish the wall. The goal of Joshua's army was to knock down the walls of Jericho in unity initiated through trumpets and music, which the army succeeded on the seventh day according to the command of God.

Bob Marley, the Jamaican singer of the 80s, created songs on poverty, oppression, injustice, and violence. He chose music as a tool for spreading the message of peace across the world, and to this date, people remember him for his music and revere him as a legend. When many voices join together to sing, the collective voice can be heard rather than the individual voice. Singers team up harmoniously to achieve the reconciled voice over the possibility of any dominating lone voice which can be dictating, overpowering, or exploiting. The main goal here would be of people coming together as one and working out their differences rather than giving way to individual voices of disunity and conflict.

To achieve the goal of the Kingdom of God, joy to the whole world, we should set aside our egos or any of the divisive elements and sing in unity. All that God wants from us is to come together as one from the diverse life settings, to work together towards integrating and transforming the world for God's glory while tasting and enjoying the fruit of salvation.

'Sisuvaay Swayame Velivaayi'
- An Appreciation of the Nativity Hymn

By: Jaya Soney (Choir)

The feast of nativity is the time of reflection for Christians, especially Orthodox. It marks the appearance of a human as the embodiment of God on earth; the day God became flesh through Jesus Christ. We sing the hymn "Sisuvaayi Swayame Velivaayi" during the evening prayer on the feast of Nativity (Yeldho). This hymn has three stanzas and is sung in Tone 1 of Syriac liturgical music. In Orthodoxy, theology is conveyed to the faithful mainly through liturgical acts and prayers- through the reading of Sedro and chanting of hymns. These readings and hymns have deep theological ideas of Orthodox faith, which we, as members of the Church, should try to learn.

Christian theology has various major topics and different interpretations of these topics by various teachers was the main reason for splits (schisms) within the Church since its beginning. Among them, Christology is the most important. Christology mainly deals with the study of the person and work of Jesus Christ. It explains His nature(s), and the identification and union of His Divinity and Humanity. When we look at the details of Christological teachings of various churches across the East and West, a clear distinction can be seen in their understanding of Jesus Christ. It is really surprising to see the extent to which the early Christian teachings were interpreted and deviated. Why should a Christian know who Jesus Christ is? St. John 17:3 says, "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent". Jesus said that eternity is the act of knowing God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The hymn that is being looked at will give an overview of Orthodox teachings on the natures revealed in Jesus Christ.

In the Orthodox faith, the incarnation of our Lord and His nature can be summed up in three points

- Jesus Christ is fully and completely God
- Jesus Christ is fully and completely Man
- Jesus Christ is not two persons but One

Colossians 1:16 says, "For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities; all things were created through Him and for Him".

St. John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without Him nothing was made that has been made."

We see in the above verses that the whole creation, visible and invisible, were created by the Triune God. The second person in the Holy Trinity, the Son of God was with God the father from the beginning. The person in the incarnate Christ is none other than the same second person in the Holy Trinity. So, in Christ's birth through the Mother of God, the Holy Theotokos, no new person came into existence. But the pre-existent Son of God now began to live as a human as a divine union. The virgin birth of Christ is so important and hence Mary has been given an important position "God bearer".

The two basic principles of Orthodoxy concerning salvation are

- The fact that only God can save His creation and if Christ is to be the Saviour, He must be fully and completely God.

- Salvation must address human needs. Only if Christ is fully and completely a human as we are, then only we can comprehend and share in what he has done for us. Since the disconnection happened in Eden, humans could not go to God, hence God has come to humans, identifying himself with His handmade in the most direct way. In the words of the Creed, the paragraph starting "And in the One Lord Jesus Christ, true God from true God..." clearly explains the doctrine of incarnation. This hymn we are referring to, categorically proclaims the lowering down of the mighty Son of God to whom the Angels sing praises always, to the level of a tender child who requires the care of a human mother. Christ himself is not a sinful person, but in His solidarity with the fallen race He accepted the full consequences of Adam's sin and became man and was raised like an ordinary human child.

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The third stanza covers the purpose of incarnation and the resurrection of Christ and how that is connected to the salvation of humankind.

It also reiterates the fact that if Jesus Christ was not resurrected from the dead, our faith and the martyrdom of martyrs do not have any meaning. 1 Cor 15:14 states "If Christ is not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain". This stanza reconfirms that the one who is not True God of true God, who has not conquered death by dying and rising from the dead cannot be our salvation and hope.

Word Became Flesh

As the faithful of the Orthodox Church, we have been given the liturgy to understand the theology in a better way and we try to pass it on to generations. Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity incarnated and lived among us. He was then crucified, died, conquered death and resurrected. The beautiful narration of Jesus Christ as a child in this hymn gives us the realization that the child born in Bethlehem on that night was human but the Son that was given that day was Son of God himself. Oriental Orthodox Church uses the term Miaphysitism to describe the two natures of Lord Jesus Christ, the complete humanity and the complete divinity.

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Shepherds - The Unexpected Access

By: Philose Pappen (Acolytes)

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalms 23:1). "I'm the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (St. John 10:11). A shepherd is the one who guides, nourishes, protects, and takes care of the flock. They would be even ready to give up their lives to save the life of their sheep.

The terms 'shepherd' and 'sheep' have been mentioned throughout the Bible from the beginning to the end. In the Old Testament, Moses and David the King were shepherds before God had called them to lead Israelites. In the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ presented himself as the good shepherd.

In the book of Isaiah, it is written (Isaiah 9:5) "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, his name will be called the angel of great counsel, for he shall bring peace upon the rulers, peace and health by him". This prediction was done long before the birth of Jesus Christ. When this good news was proclaimed by the prophet 4000 years ago, even the palaces were waiting to receive the Messiah. One might wonder why the angel of the Lord chose the shepherds and preached the good news to them in the breezing cold at midnight.

The first and foremost reason is that the Almighty God discerns and prefers those who are humble at heart, live a righteous life and truly obey God's command. St Matthew, chapter 5:6 says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled". Again, in Psalms 96:2 it is written, "Righteousness and judgment are the right ordering of His throne". The shepherds were righteous in the eyes of the Lord to receive the good news.

The second reason is their faith. The shepherders believed the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah and waited for Him without deviating their thoughts. They believed in the prophecies that a Savior will be born to redeem them from their sins. After they heard the good news, they didn't doubt or take counsel from others to check its credibility. On seeing the heavenly messengers and hearing the good news from them, they ran to see the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

The third reason is that they were awake at midnight prayerfully and vigilantly to watch their flock. Christ commanded his disciples to be alert, wise and be prepared to receive the Lord as narrated in the parable of the Ten Virgins. "Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the son of man is coming" (Matthew 25:13).

The shepherds were up, their hope was in the Lord and had the privilege to see the baby. Likewise, we should be prepared and ready for the Second Coming of Christ as we don't know the hour or time till the trumpet sounds. In the Gospel of Mark (Chapter 13:32-33) it is written that, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch, and pray; for you do not know when the time is".

Hence, during this Christmas, like the shepherds had the unexpected access to see the Savior, we should prepare ourselves to receive the good news into our lives. We are the sheep, and our shepherd is calling us to follow him. It would be a great loss if we fail to pay attention to that voice. May God bless us to receive him in our lives by living a righteous life, having strong faith in Him and being vigilant in prayer.

(The Scriptural references are from 'The Orthodox Study Bible')



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യെൽദോ പ്രദക്ഷിണവും തിജ്യാല ശുശ്രൂഷയും
"വെളിച്ചത്തിന്റെ ഉത്സവം"
By: Varghese Panicker (Acolytes)

ക്രിസ്തുമസിനോടനുബന്ധിച്ചുള്ള ഓർത്തഡോക്സ് ആരാധനക്രമം സാധാരണയായി രാത്രിയുടെ നിശ്ശബ്ദതയിലാണ് നടത്തുന്നത്. ആരെയും അതിലേക്ക് ആകർഷിക്കുന്ന തരത്തിലാണ് സഭ പരിശുദ്ധ ശുശ്രൂഷ രൂപകൽപ്പന ചെയ്തിരിക്കുന്നത്. സ്വർഗത്തിൽ നിന്ന് ഭൂമിയിലേക്കുള്ള വരവിന്റെ വിവരണാതീതമായ അനുഭവം അത് പലപ്പോഴും വിശ്വാസികളുടെ മനസ്സിൽ സൃഷ്ടിക്കുന്നു. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ 'അവതാരം' ചരിത്രത്തിൽ ഒരിക്കൽ എന്നെന്നേക്കുമായി സംഭവിച്ച ഒരു ആത്മീയ സംഭവമായതിനാൽ, എല്ലാ തലമുറയിലും പെട്ട ആളുകൾക്ക് അത് അനുഭവിക്കാൻ അവസരം ലഭിക്കണം. ഏകദേശം 2000 വർഷങ്ങൾക്ക് മുമ്പ് നടന്ന ആ ആത്മീയ സംഭവം നമ്മൾക്ക് അനുഭവിക്കാൻ ഇതല്ലാതെ മറ്റ് മാർഗമില്ല.

നാം രണ്ടു സഭാ മർമ്മങ്ങളെ ആണ് കൃസ്തുമസ് ശുശ്രൂഷയിൽ ആഘോഷിക്കുന്നത് 1. പ്രദക്ഷിണവും 2. തീ ജ്യാലാ ശുശ്രൂഷയും. ഇത് രണ്ടും ഒരുമിച്ചു ചേർത്താണ് പ. സഭ യൽദോ പെരുന്നാൾ കൊണ്ടാടുന്നത്.

പ്രദക്ഷിണം പല തരത്തിൽ നാം കാണുന്നു. ആദ്യം തന്നെ നാം വീട്ടിൽ നിന്ന് ഒരുങ്ങി ആരാധനയിലേക്കു ഇറങ്ങുന്നത് ഒരു പ്രദക്ഷിണം ആണ്. അവന്റെ വി. മന്ദിരത്തിലേക്കുള്ള വരവ്. തിരികെ വി. കുർബ്ബാനയിൽ / ആരാധനയിൽ പങ്കെടുത്തു വീട്ടിലിലേക്കു വരുന്നു. ജീവിതത്തിൽ കേന്ദ്ര ബിന്ദുവായി ദൈവത്തെ കാണുക ദൈവത്തെ ചുറ്റി ജീവിക്കുക എന്നതിനാണ് കൂടുതൽ പ്രാധാന്യം.

പ സഭയുടെ വിവാഹ കൂദാശയിൽ നാം " ഞങ്ങളുടെ സന്തോഷത്തിന്റെ ആരംഭവും അതിന്റെ പൂർത്തീകരണവും നീ ആയിരിക്കണമേ " എന്ന് പ്രാർത്ഥിക്കുന്നു. കാരണം നാം അവനിൽ ആരംഭിക്കുകയും അവനിൽ അവസാനിപ്പിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു.

ശുശ്രൂഷയിൽ പ്രദക്ഷിണം എന്നത് ദൈവത്തെ ചുറ്റി ജീവിക്കുക എന്ന അഭ്യൂതികളാണെന്നും വെളിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. സ്വർഗ്ഗത്തിൽ വാനവ വൃന്ദങ്ങൾ സിംഹാസനത്തിനു ചുറ്റും അഭംഗ്യമായി നടത്തുന്ന സ്വർഗ്ഗീയ നടനം Perichoresis (choreography) എന്ന് ഗ്രീക്ക് വാക്കിൽ നാം കാണുന്നു. അതിനാൽ വി. പൗലോസ് അപ്പോസ്തോലൻ " എല്ലാം ചന്തമായും മോടിയോടും കൂടി നടക്കുന്നു " എന്ന് സാക്ഷിക്കുന്നു. വി. ആരാധനയിൽ നമസ്കാരം എന്നത് ആരാധനയുടെ കേന്ദ്രബിന്ദുവിലേക്കു വിരൽ ചൂണ്ടുന്ന ഒരു പ്രദക്ഷിണം ആണ്, ഓരോ പ്രദക്ഷിണവും വി. മദ്ബഹയിൽ നിന്ന് ആരംഭിച്ചു തിരികെ അവിടെ എത്തി അവസാനിക്കുന്നു.

അത് കർത്താവിന്റെ രണ്ടാം വരവിനെ സൂചിപ്പിക്കുന്ന അഥവാ മനുഷ്യ പുത്രന്റെ മഹത്വ പ്രത്യക്ഷത കാണിക്കുന്ന ക്രിയ ആയി പ. സഭ ക്രമപ്പെടുത്തിയിരിക്കുന്നു. വി.

കുർബ്ബാനയിൽ / ആരാധനയിൽ നാം വി. മദ്ബഹയിൽ കടന്നു ശേഷം ഒരു പ്രദക്ഷിണമായി പടിഞ്ഞാറേക്ക് വരുന്നു. അതിൽ വി. എവൻഗേലിയോൻ ആഘോഷമായി ഉയർത്തിപിടിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത് ലോകത്തിലേക്ക് അവന്റെ രണ്ടാം വരവിനെ സൂചിപ്പിക്കുന്നു.

റാസകൾ ശ്രദ്ധിച്ചാൽ ഓരോന്നും വി. രഹസ്യങ്ങളെ നമ്മുടെ ഇടയിലേക്ക് വഹിച്ചു കൊണ്ട് വരുന്നു എന്ന് കാണാം.

ഓർമ്മപെരുന്നാളുകളുടെ റാസുകളിൽ വഹിക്കുന്ന അരുളിക്കയിൽ (Reliquary) ആ പെരുന്നാളുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട പരിശുദ്ധന്റെ തിരുശേഷിപ്പു കാണാം. അതില്ലെങ്കിൽ വി. കുർബ്ബാനയോ ഐക്കണുകളോ എഴുന്നള്ളിക്കും. നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ പൂർത്തീകരണം കർത്താവിന്റെ വരവും അവന്റെ മഹത്വ പ്രത്യക്ഷതയുമാണ്. നമുക്ക് ആരാധയിൽ ധാരാളം പ്രദക്ഷിണങ്ങൾ ഉൾപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു നാമും ദൈവിക രഹസ്യങ്ങളുടെ വാഹകർ ആണ്. പ. കന്യക മറിയം ദൈവത്തെ തന്റെ ഉദരത്തിലും തന്റെ ജീവിതത്തിലും വഹിച്ചവൾ (Christophoros) ആണ്. അവൾ ദൈവത്തെ ശരീരപ്രകാരം ഗർഭത്തിൽ വഹിക്കുകയും പ്രസവിക്കുകയും പാലുട്ടിവളർത്തുകയും ജൈവാർത്ഥത്തിൽത്തന്നെ ദൈവത്തിന് അമ്മയാകുകയും ചെയ്ത, Holy Theotokos അഥവാ മറിയാം യൊൽദാസ് ആലോഹൊ ആണ്.

തീജ്യാലാ ശുശ്രൂഷ യൽദോ പെരുന്നാളിൽ വിശുദ്ധ കുർബ്ബാനയ്ക്ക് മുമ്പായി, പള്ളിയുടെ മുറ്റത്ത് ഒരു ശുശ്രൂഷ നടക്കുന്നു. കുരിശിന്റെ ആകൃതിയിലുള്ള കുഴിയിലോ പാത്രത്തിലോ കത്തുന്ന തീയിൽ നടത്തുന്ന തീജ്യാല ശുശ്രൂഷയിലെ. ഈ ആത്മീയ അഗ്നി അർത്ഥവത്തായതും ബൈബിൾ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിലുള്ളതുമാണ്. ക്രിസ്തു മസ് ശുശ്രൂഷയിൽ രണ്ടു ക്രമങ്ങൾ ആണ് ഉള്ളത് എന്ന് പറഞ്ഞുവല്ലോ. ആദ്യത്തേത് പ്രദക്ഷിണവും രണ്ടാമത്തേത് തീജ്യാല ശുശ്രൂഷയും അതിനോടുചേർന്നുള്ള സ്റ്റീബാ ആഘോഷവുമാണ്. രണ്ടാമത്തേതിന് പ.സഭ കൂടുതൽ പ്രാധാന്യം കൊടുക്കുന്നു.

ഇവിടെ പ്രദക്ഷിണം, കിഴക്കുനിന്നുള്ള നക്ഷത്രം വരുന്നതിനെയും ആട്ടിയന്മാർ പുൽത്തൊട്ടിലിലേക്കു വരുന്നതിനെയും, രാജാക്കന്മാർ കാലിക്കുട്ടിലേക്കു വരുന്നതിനെയും ഏറ്റവും ഉപരിയായി മാലാഖ വ്യന്ദം താഴത്തേക്ക് വരുന്നതിനെയും സൂചിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. യൽദോയിൽ ഇവയോടെല്ലാം ചേർന്ന് നാമും തീജ്യാലയിലേക്കു എത്തിച്ചേരുന്നു.

ക്രിസ്ത്യൻ മതപാരമ്പര്യത്തിലും ഇന്ത്യൻ സാംസ്കാരിക പാരമ്പര്യത്തിലും, 'തീ'യെ 'ദൈവത്തിന്റെ ഇരിപ്പിടം' ആയി കണക്കാക്കുന്നു ഇത് ദൈവസാന്നിധ്യത്തിന്റെ മാധ്യമവും പ്രതീകവുമാണ്. ഇരുട്ടിനെ ഇല്ലാതാക്കുന്നതാണ് വെളിച്ചം.

വെളിച്ചം ദൈവത്തെ സൂചിപ്പിക്കുന്നു അവിടെ ഇരുട്ടിനെ തിന്മയായും നാം കാണുന്നു. ലോകത്തിന്റെ പ്രകാശവും, ഉദയ പ്രഭാതവും, ജനതകൾക്ക് വെളിപ്പെടാനുള്ള വെളിച്ചവുമായവൻ(ലൂക്കോസ് 2, 32) ജനിച്ചതിനാൽ ക്രിസ്തു മസ് "വെളിച്ചത്തിന്റെ ഉത്സവം" എന്നറിയപ്പെടുന്നു.

(1) വിശുദ്ധ ബൈബിളിൽ, ദൈവം മുൾപടർപ്പിൽ അഗ്നിയുടെ രൂപത്തിലും സീനായ് പർവതത്തിലെ പ്രകാശത്തിന്റെ മിന്നലായും മോശയുടെ മുമ്പാകെ പ്രത്യക്ഷപ്പെടുന്നതായി കാണുന്നു (പുറപ്പാട് 3:3-6, 19:16-20).

ക്രിസ്തു മസ് ആരാധനയ്ക്കിടയുള്ള അഗ്നി വെളിച്ചത്തിന്റെ മിന്നലിനെ സൂചിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. ഇതിലൂടെ മോശ സാക്ഷ്യം വഹിച്ച കത്തുന്ന മുൾപടർപ്പിലെ ദൈവത്തിന്റെ മഹത്വവും സാന്നിധ്യവും പ്രതീകാത്മകമായി നമ്മോട് സംവദിക്കുന്നു.

(2) പരിശുദ്ധ സഭയുടെ വിശ്വാസപ്രമാണമനുസരിച്ച് (നിഖ്യാ വിശ്വാസപ്രമാണം), യേശുക്രിസ്തു "പ്രകാശത്തിൽ നിന്നുള്ള പ്രകാശവും സത്യദൈവത്തിൽ നിന്നുള്ള സത്യ ദൈവവുമാണ്".

തീ ദൈവം തന്നെ. മുൾപ്പടർപ്പിൽ മോശ കണ്ടതും മറിയം ഉദരത്തിൽ വഹിച്ചതുമായ അതേ അഗ്നി തന്നെ. യൽദോ ആരാധനയിൽ വിശ്വാസികൾ വന്നുചേരുന്നത് ദഹിപ്പിക്കുന്നതും ശുദ്ധീകരിക്കുന്നതും പ്രോജലിപ്പിക്കുന്നതുമായ അഗ്നിയിലേക്കാണ്. ഈ അഗ്നിയിൽ എറിയപ്പെട്ട മൂന്നു പൈതങ്ങൾ ദഹിച്ചു പോയില്ല. എന്നാൽ അവരെ കൊണ്ട് പോയവർ കത്തിപ്പോയി. അതുകൊണ്ടു ഈ അഗ്നി പൈശാചികതയെ ദഹിപ്പിക്കുന്നതും ശുദ്ധ ആത്മാക്കളെ ശുദ്ധീകരിക്കുന്നതും കൂടുതൽ പ്രോജലിപ്പിക്കുന്നതുമാണ്. ഈ അഗ്നിയിൽ നാം നശിക്കുകയില്ല. ഈ തീയാകുന്ന പൈതലിനെ വഹിച്ച വി. മറിയം വെന്തുപോയില്ല. നാം നമ്മെത്തന്നെ ഈ തീയിൽ സമർപ്പിക്കുന്നു. നമ്മുടെ പഴമയെ ഉരിഞ്ഞു കളഞ്ഞു പുതു ചിന്തയുള്ള പുതു ദർശനമുള്ള പുതിയ മനുഷ്യരായി തീരുന്നു. ഉണ്ണിയെ കണ്ടതിനുശേഷം വേറെ വഴിയായി തിരികെ പോയ മൂന്ന് രാജാക്കന്മാരെ പോലെ.

മേൽപ്പട്ട ഉയരങ്ങളിൽ സ്വർഗ്ഗീയ മാലാഖമാർ സ്തുതിക്കുന്നത് പോലെ ബലഹീനരും മണ്മയരുമായ ഞങ്ങളും സ്തുതിച്ചുപറയുന്നു..... എന്ന മാലാഖമാരുടെ സ്തുതി ആലപിച്ചുകൊണ്ട് ഈ വി. ശുശ്രൂഷയിൽ നാം കുന്തുരൂക്കം അർപ്പിക്കുമ്പോൾ, ദരിദ്രരായ ഇടയന്മാരെയും കിഴക്ക് നിന്നുള്ള വിദ്യാന്മാരെയും പോലെ ദാവീദിന്റെ നഗരത്തിൽ നമുക്കുവേണ്ടി ജനിച്ച നമ്മുടെ കർത്താവും ദൈവവുമായ യേശുക്രിസ്തുവിന് നമ്മൾക്കുള്ളതിനേയും നമ്മെത്തന്നെയും കാഴ്ചയായി സമർപ്പിക്കുന്നു. സങ്കീർത്തനക്കാരൻ ദൈവത്തോട് വാഗ്ദത്തം ചെയ്യുന്നതുപോലെ (സങ്കീ 66, സങ്കീ 55) ഈ തീജ്വാലയിലേക്കു നാം കുന്തിരിക്കും സമർപ്പിക്കുമ്പോൾ അത് ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ മധുരവും സുഗന്ധവും ഉത്തമവുമായ കാഴ്ച ആയി തീരുന്നു. അത് നമ്മുടെ മനസ്സുകളെ ശുദ്ധീകരിക്കുന്നു.

ഈ തീജ്വാല ശുശ്രൂഷ നമ്മെ ദൈവ വിശ്വാസത്തിന്റെ ഉയർന്ന തലത്തിലേക്ക് എത്തിക്കുന്നു. ശേഷം നാം പ്രാർത്ഥനകൾ തുടരുമ്പോൾ സ്വർഗ്ഗ സൈന്യം താണിറങ്ങി മനുഷ്യനോടൊപ്പം ചേർന്ന് മഹത്വവും സ്തുതികളും ദൈവത്തിനു സമർപ്പിക്കുന്നു. ശുശ്രൂഷയിലെ ഏറ്റവും മഹത്തരമായ സമയം ഇവിടെയാണ്. സ്വർഗ്ഗവും ഭൂമിയും ഇവിടെ സമ്മേളിക്കുന്നു.

അതിനാൽ, ക്രിസ്തുമസിന്റെ ഈ ആചാരപരമായ വിശുദ്ധ ശുശ്രൂഷയിലൂടെ, ശാരീരികവും മാനസികവുമായ തലത്തിൽ ദൈവത്തിന്റെ മഹത്വം കാണാനും അതിലേക്ക് രൂപാന്തരപ്പെടാനുമുള്ള അവസരമാണ് നമുക്കും ലഭിക്കുന്നത്. അവനിലേക്ക് പ്രവേശനം ലഭിക്കാനുള്ള ഭാഗ്യം നമുക്കുണ്ട് (ഗലാത്യർ 4:4-7).

ഏകദേശം 2000 വർഷങ്ങൾക്ക് മുമ്പ് നടന്ന ആ ആത്മീയ സംഭവം നമുക്ക് അനുഭവിക്കാൻ മറ്റ് മാർഗമില്ല. എല്ലാ വിശ്വാസത്തോടും പ്രത്യാശയോടും സ്നേഹത്തോടും കൂടി ഈ ശുശ്രൂഷയിൽ പൂർണ്ണഹൃദയത്തോടെ പങ്കെടുക്കുന്നവർ തീർച്ചയായും നമ്മുടെ രക്ഷകനായ യേശുക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ പ്രസന്നമായ മുഖം കണ്ടെത്തും.

ആരാധനാക്രമത്തിൽ, സമയ-സ്ഥല തുടർച്ചയെ മറികടന്ന് നാം വർത്തമാനത്തിൽ നിന്ന് ഭൂതകാലത്തിലേക്ക് സമയ-യന്ത്രത്തിൽ ഒരു യാത്ര (റാസ) നടത്തുന്നു.

ഓർത്തഡോക്സ് ആരാധന, ഒരേ സമയം, ഒരു ഭൗമിക ആരാധനയും സ്വർഗ്ഗീയ ആരാധനയുമാണ്. ക്രിസ്തുമസ് ആരാധന, സ്തുതി, സ്തോത്രം, സ്മരണ, അപേക്ഷ, അല്ലെങ്കിൽ അനുതാപം എന്നിവ പ്രതിഫലിപ്പിക്കുന്ന ആചാരപരമായ വിശുദ്ധ ശുശ്രൂഷയാണ്. ഉണ്ണിയേശുവിലൂടെ ദൈവവുമായുള്ള പവിത്രമായ ഒരു ബന്ധം

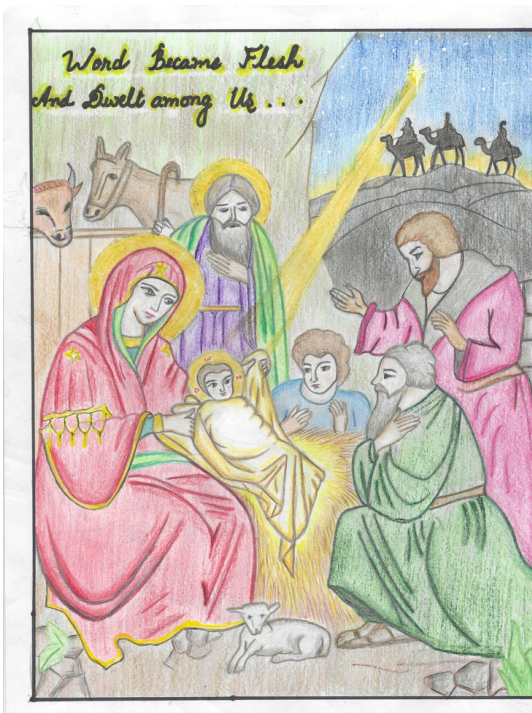
Word Became Flesh

സ്ഥാപിക്കുന്നതിനുള്ള അടിസ്ഥാനമായി ക്രിസ്തുമസ് ശുശ്രൂഷ ഒരുക്കപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. ദൈവം എല്ലാവരെയും അനുഗ്രഹിക്കട്ടെ എല്ലാവർക്കും മംഗളകരമായ ഒരു ക്രിസ്തുമസും ഐശ്വര്യമുള്ള ഒരു നവവത്സരവും (2023) ആശംസിച്ചുകൊള്ളുന്നു.



Drawing By:
Anya Varghese
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Procession & Fire in the Advent Liturgy

By: Kevin Kuriakose Joseph (Acolytes)

The first lesson every survival manual teaches a naïve camper is the technique to start a fire. If you lose your tracks, fire helps to stay warm and guides you through the rugged trenches of wayfinding. Fire has been so indispensable in our lives, and if history has taught us something, it is that fire has been a source of strength and warmth - often considered as a divine gift from God. In theology, scholars study 'Theophany' which is the different manifestations of God through the Bible in various ways and events.

Throughout the Bible, fire has been a symbol of God, coming down from heaven to earth. In the first five books of the Bible, God manifested to Israelites in the form of 'pillars of fire and cloud' for 40 years, which guided Israelites during their Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 13:21-22). This event is the first recorded procession in the Bible and shows the different manifestations of God through fire and spirit. Processions are an important part of our church traditions, as it allows every member of the church to become carriers of holy mysteries just like the Israelites.

One of the first references to fire being considered divine is when God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush (Exodus 3:3-6). One of the Cappadocian Fathers, Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes "Just as on the mountain the bush burned but was not consumed, so also the Virgin gave birth to the light and was not corrupted. Nor should you consider the comparison to the bush to be embarrassing, for it prefigures the God-bearing body of the Virgin" (St Gregory of Nyssa, in Luigi Gambero's *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, p. 155).

Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ while being a virgin, just as the bush was burning without being consumed. This is the same fire which poured from heaven when Elijah wanted to show Lord's greatness (1 Kings 18:38) and the same fire which John the Baptist refers to when he prophesied that the 'Messiah will baptize you with Holy Spirit and fire' (Matthew 3:11). The Holy Fire transcends darkness(evil) and time allowing us to experience the full glory of the Lord. If the divine presence was revealed in the form of a burning bush and the divine child was borne by Mary, Theotókos or Mother Mary is indeed the 'God-bearer'. It was at the Council of Ephesus, that our church fathers acknowledged the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as true God and true man, by confirming the divinity of St. Mary. Hence, we recite in Nicene Creed, that Jesus Christ as

Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human".

(Nicene Creed)

The procession with the cross during the Advent Day mass symbolizes the act of sanctification of the Church by leaving heaven and coming down to the earth similar to how Jesus came down from heaven for our sins. Through the holy prayers and hymns in the procession, we ask God to sanctify and purify our hearts. The circling around the Holy Fire and offering frankincense to the fire symbolizes our offerings to Christ and the burning of Palm leaves from Hosanna symbolizes the act of purification of minds and bodies. These rituals offer us an opportunity to experience the unseen mysteries and the glory of God in the present time. There is no doubt that if we come prepared to cleanse our bodies and minds and partake in the Holy Eucharist on Nativity Day, we can renew our minds and embody Christ in our lives.

Drawing By:
Jincymol K Philip
(OCYM)



Dr Richard Joseph - Optometrist

**IF WE COULD BUT PAINT WITH THE HAND
WHAT WE SEE WITH THE EYE...**

| | |
|--|---|
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John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the Son from the father."

This journal is a humble attempt to adore Christ the Lord who revealed the Eternal God the Creator who prefers to dwell among the sinful humans. Believing that our saviour has finally arrived, He is the 'word became flesh' through all what happened in His life including His passion and resurrection, we thrive to serve the Lord and His creation through the Holy Spirit that lives in us. It was out of His ever-enduring love for us, He took Human form and experienced all the emotions and trials that come with being mortal. There is no one else who could understand us like Him. During this Christmas, let us try to fathom the love He has for us and try to share the same love with the world.

With Warm Regards,
OCYM Team & Editorial Board

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'Urava' is conceived to provide a platform to interact and share views on various themes of relevance from time to time.

This journal is a product of the brilliant contributions from all our Spiritual organizations during the post-resurrection season.

'Urava' means an ever-flowing source of water. It could be the beginning point of a large stream that can quench the thirst of whoever is approaching. This literary initiative by OCYM aims to provide enlightening thoughts and ideas to thirsty souls for their spiritual edification.

This will serve as a hub for writers and thinkers to express their views and share their insights into the vibrant life of our community.

This project showcases what more we could achieve when our entire Church comes together to create something unique. Through these pages, our beloved members share their musings, reflections, and testimonials for this issue's theme 'Word Became Flesh'

Initiated by SGOCT OCYM





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With Warm Regards,
OCYM Team & Editorial Board