

Christmas: A Mystery and a History



“God became a human person” (Jn 1:14) – a turning point in human history and an incredible act to human minds. Yes, how and why does God, who is beyond the bounds of space and time, confine himself to space and time to become like one of us?...

Though God had infinite ways of reaching human beings, he deliberately chose to come to us as a human person. In my humble opinion, God had no other option here, but to take birth as a human person. Yes, to understand human and love human beings fully, he had to appear as a human person. And similarly, for us the humans to understand and love him, he had to become a person like us, with a body and soul; he had to talk the human language; were he to speak a non-human language, he could not have revealed himself fully and nor could we have grasped sufficiently. Wittgenstein, one of the great linguistic philosophers of our times, makes it clear that if lions could talk we will not be able to understand. God had to undergo the human uncertainties of everyday life; undergo the pain and suffering, had to face rejection and betrayal by his own chosen close friend; accused unjustly and penalised for no crime of his! So much so, as St. Paul succinctly puts it, “...He was like any one of us, except in sin” (Heb. 4:15). And had he not decided to be born as a human person, we would have never known who (or what, or even whether) God is! That’s why, as Karl Rahner, a famous theologian, puts it, **Jesus is God’s face turned towards to humanity**. So, God who is beyond the categories of space and time, willingly and purposefully subjected himself to them. Though he did not get a place in the inn at Bethlehem yet he found a permanent place in the human history, and at that a decisive and lasting one. **Yes, since his birth, the human history has been divided into two parts, as before and after the Christ!**

We need to stop for a moment to reflect on how to make this big Mystery a part of my history. Unless I make this great event of Incarnation of Jesus a part of my life and my own history, that decisive intervention of God in human history will not make any impact upon my life. One of the fundamental ways to make Christmas a part of my history is to see humanness in human beings and thereby to see God in them; we need to realize that unless we see God in human beings, we can never ever see God anywhere, because human beings have been created in his own image and likeness.

This Christmas poses a challenge to us. This challenge comes to us in the form a very simple question: **What happened to the Jesus who was born last year, 2011?** Last year also we spent four weeks of Advent... we celebrated a solemn high mass for Christmas and at the end of mass, we wished, hugging and kissing one another. But have we ever stopped to ask, “What happened of that Jesus who was born last year?” Unless we provide the guest with a welcoming atmosphere, no one will stay at our home; unless the seed gets the proper soil and nourishment, it will not sprout and grow. Similarly, unless we provide a conducive atmosphere in our hearts, Jesus who is born there will not remain there, will not grow into a mature, adult Jesus. Perhaps, we don’t want him to grow in our hearts into an adult Jesus; for, we are afraid of him... you know, why?...

Usually in our Churches, we get the maximum number of people on two occasions: one, a day of Christmas, and the other, a Good Friday. There may be many reasons for this; but one of them, I think, is that on both these occasions Jesus cannot challenge us: **On the day of Christmas**, Jesus is too small to challenge us; he is there like as a little baby, smiling and crying, we admire the baby, and may be, sing a lullaby and go on our own way; and on **Good Friday**, Jesus is speechless and motionless on the Cross; he will not challenge us; we take pity on him, may be, shed a drop of tear, and go on our own way. In-between, we conveniently set aside the grown-up Jesus, the adult Jesus; so we go to him before he begins to talk and we go to him after

he ceases to speak! When he speaks to us, he challenges us and when he challenges us, and if we were to take him seriously, we cannot but change our lives.

But in my opinion, if we sit back and quietly reflect on the crib – the manger, the star, the shepherds, Mary, Joseph and the babe Jesus with the innocent smiles – the very scene of the crib can challenge us in many ways; some of them are:

- The presence of the shepherds challenges us to value **simplicity** in the world of pomp and glory! God sent the angel to inform of the great news of the birth of the Messiah, not to the king Herod, not to the Chief Priests and the learned, but to the simple and uneducated shepherds.
- The very smiles of the babe Jesus in the manger challenge us to appropriate the virtue of **humility**, in the world of pride and arrogance! as St. Paul puts it, “Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross!” (Phil 2: 6 ff). We need to realize that without humility there is no genuine spirituality.
- The very Incarnation of Jesus teaches us that we need to see **the sacredness of humanity**. God reaches out by becoming a human person, he invites us to reach him in and through other human persons, who have been created in the image and likeness of God.

Unless we stop to reflect upon these challenges and lessons of Christmas,
unless we allow these sublime mysteries to touch our lives, and
unless we allow them to make a positive impact on our lives...
this Christmas too will be a routine, superficial and merely a social phenomenon.

And next year, at the same time, we will have to wonder “what happened to Jesus who was born in 2012?”

With Prayerful greetings,
Fr. Stephen Jayard
Papal Seminary, Pune, India
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