

CHRISTMAS—YEAR A

Karl Barth, one of the great theologians, was asked a question at the end of his lecture at the University of Chicago Divinity School. “Of all the theological insights you have ever had, which do you consider to be the greatest of them all?” Karl Barth closed his tired eyes and thought for a minute. Then he half smiled, opened his eyes, and said to those young seminarians, “The greatest theological insight that I have ever had is this: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” Christmas is the celebration of this great Divine Love for us sinful humans.

The Hindus believe in 10 incarnations of God. The purpose of these incarnations is stated in their Holy Scripture, *Bagavath Geetha* or “Song of God.” *God incarnates to restore righteousness in the world whenever there is a large-scale erosion of moral values.* But the Christian Scriptures teach only one Incarnation, and its purpose is given in John 3:16: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* God loved us first. God became man so that men might become like God. Jesus, the son of God, revealed to us the God by His teachings and the signs and wonders He worked. Who can reveal God to us better than the Son of God, God himself? So, Christmas is God sharing His love with us.

Christmas is also the feast of the Emmanuel, “God with us.” Jesus lives with us as Emmanuel in the Sacraments (especially in the Holy Eucharist), in the Bible, in the praying community, and in each believer, as the Holy Spirit residing in us makes us His “Temples.” Christmas reminds us that we are bearers of God with the missionary privilege and duty of conveying Jesus to those around us by loving them as Jesus did, through sacrificial, humble, committed service. Sharing with others Jesus, the Emmanuel living within us, is the best Christmas gift we can give, or receive, today. [As a little girl climbed onto Santa’s lap, Santa asked the usual, “And what would you like for Christmas?” The child stared at him open-mouthed and horrified for a minute, then gasped, “Didn’t you get my E-mail?”]

God comes to us every day. He came to the people of Israel in an unexpected way. He comes to us in the Eucharist. He was born in Bethlehem which is south of Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary came from Nazareth which is north. They came to Bethlehem to be enrolled as we heard in the gospel reading of today. Why Bethlehem? Because Joseph’s family was from there. King David was from Bethlehem, and Joseph belonged to the family of David. That is how Jesus became the descendant of David, the great king of Israel. Luke in the gospel of today highlights two important things: 1) That Jesus was a Davidic king—He was the heir to the throne of David; and 2) He is also a divine king. He is “Christ and Lord.” He is the *Curios* which means “divine king.” The first reading is the prophecy of this Davidic king who will be born. That prophecy is fulfilled in Christ.

Bethlehem means “house of bread.” Jesus became the bread of life. “I am the bread of life.” He was wrapped in



swaddling cloth and laid in a manger. The swaddling cloth points to His passion, death, and burial when He was wrapped in linen and placed in the tomb. Jesus was not *born* in a manger but was *laid* in a manger to provide a sort of bed for a baby. We visited these places during our recent visit to the Holy Land. We waited nearly three hours to get to that spot. There was the place where Jesus was born, and about 15 feet away was the manger where

Jesus was placed—a food trough for animals. Jesus born in Bethlehem became the bread for the life of the world. It is Him we receive in the Eucharist.

A while ago a couple came to me for Confession after 40 years. I asked them what made them come to Confession and return to the Church after 40 years? Both of them said the same thing—that they realized how much they missed the Eucharist. They said, “The crackers and grape juice are not doing it for us. We need the Eucharist—the real Body and Blood of Christ.

Christmas gives us hope. It gives us hope that God is not done with humanity. He wants us to look forward to salvation. He wants us to look forward to heaven. Many of us live in our past. We are haunted by the sins of our past and we live in it. But God wants us to look forward to what He could accomplish in us in the future. He has a plan for us. He wants us to look forward to what we can become—what we can accomplish with His grace. The devil reminds us of our past and wants us to live in it. But God wants us to look to our future with Him.

Christmas is also a time of joy. It is a wonderful time of year. There are decorations, songs, gift-giving, and gatherings with loved ones. We have tried to make this season a light and happy one because there is the joy that God became man. A couple was unhappy that neither of their children was coming home for Christmas. Three days before Christmas, the dad called his son and said, “I hate to ruin your day, son, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are getting a divorce—45 years of marriage . . . and that much misery is enough!” “Dad, what are you talking about?” the son yelled. “We can’t stand the sight of each other any longer,” the old dad explained. “We’re sick of each other, and I’m sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Hong Kong and tell her!” Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. “Like heck they’re getting divorced,” she shouts, “I’ll take care of this.” She calls her father immediately, and screams at him, “You are not getting divorced. Don’t do a single thing until I get there. I’m calling my brother back, and we’ll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don’t do a thing, you hear me?” she yelled as she hung up the phone. The man turned to his wife and said “Honey, it worked. They’re both coming for Christmas and paying their own airfare.”

Jesus comes to us every day. He comes to us in the Eucharist. Let us look forward with hope and receive Him with joy. He is the source of joy. Without Him there is no joy. Let us share Christ with others and bring that joy to someone else as well this Christmas.