

Reflection for December 2020
Theme: Incarnation in the Book of Isaiah

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isa 9:2)*

Once upon a time in a city not far from our own, there lived a crazy scientist, a maverick of sorts! His inventions were way ahead of his time, one better than the other. But he was still waiting to make his masterpiece.

And one day, he hit upon it. He put together a machine with which he could make an ant! This was his first invention that had life in it! This was the moment he had been waiting for, forever. He would spend hours gazing at his masterpiece; he never left this ant out of sight for even a minute. He gazed upon it as it went about its way. One day the scientist saw that a large flow of water was moving towards the little ant. The ant, however, couldn't see beyond his little ant eyes, and so he unwittingly was moving towards the water! The scientist tried everything from putting his hand, to blocking and even blowing it away but the ant would manage to outwit his attempts...to say the least the ant was stubborn like all ants are. It refused to change the course of its path.

The scientist was now worried. He could not let his beloved creation die. He loved it beyond everything. But how could he get the message across when the ant only understood ant-language? Only another ant could go and get the first ant to move away from the water!

And so, this crazy scientist walked into the machine he made, knowing fully well what he was stepping into - and came out an ant! He ran straight to the ant he had earlier made and warned him of the gush of water and led him to safety.

This story sounds like a lark to the untrained ear. After all, as terrible our lives are, as much as we might, even, at times, wish our lives would end, we would never exchange the life as know it for the life of an ant! And yet that's what God did many Christmases ago... when we, oblivious to the fact that we were His masterpieces, or that He loved us, were heading toward death and destruction. God had exhausted every other way but his love would not give up. So Jesus became human for us (from being the Darling of Heaven to a mere mortal, that's far worse than Man becoming an ant!) to whisper his eternal Truth to us, and guide us back to safety and in the process pay the price of his own life.

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given”

Clearly Isaiah is using the Hebrew literary tool of repetition to emphasis on the birth of the Child and yet one cannot ignore the deeper significance hidden in the repetition.

The Messiah could have been an angel, or God without humanity but that was never God's plan. Much like the maverick in the story, God became mere human. He takes on our frailties, our helplessness and our punishment- and thus a child had to be 'born',

not descending like a lightning bolt from the sky but like a little seed sprouting, in the most obscure of , in the most insignificant of places- a stable!

Jesus, the Messiah could have come like Adam, a full grown man, but he came as a babe born, There is nothing weaker, more helpless and more dependent than a child. God it seems wanted to capture our hearts not by force but with the innocence and neediness of a child.

Interestingly while the child is born, the Son is not born, but *given*. Jesus, the Son, the second person in the Trinity did not need to be born, but *given* to this broken world. The eternal Son, who always existed, He is given to us! Not on a loan, for a fixed time, not even as a reward as if we deserved Him! He is simply given... forever and for always! If our heads are not spinning already at this, we are probably not reading it right!

And so in this simple verse, we see the humanity and the divinity of Jesus revealed to us. He is at once both fully human and fully divine. Not only does God take on our humanity, he comes offering us his divinity as well! It is not a barter of two natures but an intimate sharing that Jesus is calling us into, something like the mingling of the water and wine at Mass. However, before we share in the divinity that Jesus offers us, we must first be willing to be fully human! To be “totally human” as Peter Kreeft emphasis “to have intelligence and moral virtue and well-ordered emotions and *a sense of humour* and all of that- that’s part of what Christ is- he is the complete human being!”

Isn’t it strange that until very recently, artists never painted a smiling Jesus, leave alone a laughing one! For years, we held on to the notion that Jesus never laughed in the Gospels, conveniently overlooking the humorous undertones in a number of his parables and teachings! Christmas calls us not just to warm our hearts but also to colour(evangelize) our imaginations!

The Catholic Church does not canonise a saint unless all the fruits of the Holy Spirit be found in them- and that includes joy, or may we add, especially joy! In our well-meaning but sometimes misguided attempts to embrace our humanity may we never forget the significance of joy and humour in that journey! In our ‘serious’ attempts to share in Christ’s divinity may we not forget to carry along with us an extra dose of humour, because Heaven knows we will need it! As C.S. Lewis says that “Joy will be the serious business of Heaven!”.

When we think of Christ being “totally human” are we quick to imagine a joyous Jesus or a suffering one?

Would our communities describe us as good humoured, joyous, exuberant even laughing individuals or the very opposite of these?

To think about the Incarnation and to miss the joy that this season invites us to, is to miss a huge part of the Incarnation. Jesus comes not only to share in our suffering but also to invite us to share in his joy! Or as more aptly put across by Fr Ronald Rolheiser, “Christmas invites us to be happy! Even when we no longer believe in Santa, and all the

cribs, lights, carols, cards, colourful wrapping-paper, and gifts of Christmas no longer bring the same thrill, the same invitation still remains: Christmas invites us to be happy."

And the government will be upon His shoulder.

Remember when 25th December was declared as Good Governance Day? Perhaps it humorously proves the point God writes straight through crooked lines! ☺
Can we lighten up and smile knowing He carries our burden on His shoulder and not the other way round! And on a national and global level there is tremendous hope in spite of everything; a hope that power and influence will belong again to the One who deserves it.

With this hope we pray as Jesus taught us to pray- *Thy kingdom come*. We pray for God's kingdom to be manifested on earth not just in the inevitable yet distant future, but in the here and now! And what would that kingdom look like to us? Isaiah spells it out-

Wonderful Counsellor- In the kingdom of God there will be no confusion. In the Gospels we find that whenever someone came to Jesus, he knew exactly who to show compassion to, who to challenge, who to rebuke. In fact even his naysayers agreed "Never did a man speak the way this man speaks" (John 7:46)

With Jesus, there is no ambiguity or uncertainty or doubt or confusion.

Are we instruments of counsel or confusion in our communities and work places?

Mighty God-The kingdom of Jesus will have no chaos. In fact, Jesus is the One who brings order out of chaos. Scripture says, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (1 Corinthians 14:33). Jesus brings order into the lives of all who surrender to Him. But this surrender is not out of fear but out of love. Jesus is a Mighty God not a Bully who forces us to revere him.

If order is the opposite of chaos, how do we bring order in our areas of influence? Do we play the tyrant or do we become Jesus?

Within our own communities, are we agents of chaos or order?

Everlasting Father:His leadership is based on a relationship. He's our Father and we can never be orphans or wanderers with no one to lay claim on us. Unlike all earthly relationships, God's Fatherhood is eternal! What a relief!

Are we spiritual mothers to the young ones in our communities? Would they find newer and stronger relationships within the community or is there a permanent sense of loss they carry within themselves?

Prince of Peace:Finally God's kingdom will be one without conflict, doubt or fear, it will be one of peace! In fact Peace was announced at his very birth! "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests." (Luke 2:14)
Peace is also what Jesus assured his disciples, "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."- John 14:27.

Despite our outward silence and sense of calm are we at peace or is there a simmering restlessness? What are the primary thoughts in our mind when we sit to pray? What are the things that steal our peace?

As we consider what God's kingdom would look like, and as we fervently pray for his kingdom to come, *do we see our communities being models of God's kingdom?* If not, what can we change in our attitude, in our behaviour or in our lifestyle that can help it look like God's kingdom?

And so this Christmas, let us find joy in the Truth that unto us a Child is *born*, unto us a Son is *given*. Let us rest assured knowing that everything from his name to his lineage, his birth to his death, in fact his entire life was for YOU and I!
May we take hope from the words of an old Christmas hymn that beautifully echoes the roles Jesus plays in our lives-

*And when your heart is full of joy
You call him Wonderful!
And when you've almost lost your way,
You call him Counsellor
And in the midst of your confusion
Whisper Prince of Peace
And when you're all alone, He'll be Emmanuel
JESUS, We'll call Him JESUS!*

Happy Christmas!

Questions to ponder-

Q1. Would we call our communities 'joyous' homes?

Q2. Do our communities model the kingdom values as mentioned above?