



Chapter – Christmas 2021 Emmanuel, the Guiding Light of Love



Very dear Sisters and Friends,

We have faced many new challenges since the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic. Despite our efforts over the past two years to eradicate the coronavirus, we still grope in the darkness with the arrival of new variants. In this context, Christmas gives us an opportunity to celebrate life in the birth of Jesus, in the unfolding of God's unconditional love, Emmanuel – God with us. Christmas is all about God's light of love that recreates everything, transcending time, space, and circumstances. All of creation, born out of God's breath and word, is reborn in Jesus, the incarnation of God's word and God's life. Christmas thus celebrates the rebirth of the entire creation with new life in Christ.

God's word became flesh in Jesus to dispel the darkness of sin and to make us children of light. Many prophecies were written concerning the coming of Jesus Christ. For example, Isaiah wrote, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-- on them light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2). The Evangelist John saw this fulfilled in Jesus and wrote, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him" (John 1:9-10). The evangelist explains further, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus is the true light of God's love in the world, and yet we often fail to recognize the presence of this divine light. And every year, Christmas reminds us of the guiding light of God's love in the unfolding history of humans and of the whole of creation.

How do we recognise the presence of God's guiding light in our daily lives? The synoptic traditions offer us a fitting response. When we focus on the Lukan infancy narrative, we realize that the Shepherds, the



first followers of Jesus, had to make a journey to see the light of the world. The Evangelist Luke wrote, "When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.' And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger" (Luke 2:15-16). Here the words of Saint Francis de Sales interpreting the first Christmas night are very helpful: "The shepherds' field was enlightened by heavenly light and was filled with

angelic music. Whereas the crib in Bethlehem was surrounded by darkness, biting cold, and the cry of the newborn baby Jesus. However, it was not in the shepherd's field but in the crib of Bethlehem that God was found." The shepherds left the comforts of their spacious field and approached the insignificant crib of the homeless child. There they experienced God's presence. Similarly, the magi or the wise men from the East, guided by the star of God's light, had to set out on a journey to an unknown place to worship the newborn baby Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12).

Christmas Today

Christmas this year invites us to discern a similar journey in our personal, family, and communal lives. Just as the wise men and the shepherds had to leave their comfort and consolation to go find a poor manger

and to discover Emmanuel, so also, we have to let go of “something” or to make radical shifts in our attitudes in order to get a glimpse of the divine life, to find God in both the pleasant and not-so-pleasant, or the comfortable and not-so-comfortable experiences of our daily lives. We receive many invitations to look deep within ourselves to recognize the dark areas or personal peripheries of our lives, to open our eyes to see God’s guiding light within the fragile areas and difficult moments of our lives, and to allow ourselves to be guided by the light of God’s love.

The pandemic has brought us into a world of uncertainties, and relationships in our countries, families and communities are becoming more and more challenging. It is in this context that we ask ourselves: what does it mean to be guided by God’s light of love? How do we become a guiding light of love to others? God’s love revealed at Christmas teaches that our lives are not about ourselves, but about our neighbours, families and communities. Let us strive to develop a heart of warmth and inner peace, radiating the joy of Christmas. It is not something impossible.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, let us make three shifts in our attitudes or three inner journeys: (1) A journey from ME to the OTHER when we think of happiness and peace. Here the focus is on the other and we find joy in making others happy. It is about abandoning the petty thoughts such as, “they were not kind to me, and so why should I be kind to them?” or “they never gave me anything, and so why should I give them something?” In fact, it does not take that much to be kind even to people who are not so kind to us or to be respectful even to people who are not respectful in return. (2) A journey from the OTHER to ME when we think of making changes. Here the focus is on ourselves, and we are no longer trying to change others but to change ourselves. If we dare to change our attitudes and thoughts, everything changes. Let us try to become a reflection of what we would like to receive from others by transforming ourselves. (3) A journey from ME and the OTHER to GOD’S WAYS. Here the focus is on God’s ways, on God’s guiding presence in our lives. The humble birth of Jesus shows us that God’s values and measures are different from ours. God makes insignificant places and hopeless situations significant and life-giving.

May the message of Christmas this year unsettle our hearts and give us the grace to strive harder to reflect God’s love and God’s designs for us. If we are radiating positive thoughts and feelings — kindness, understanding, forgiveness, and goodness — then that is what we will get in return. So, it is up to each one of us to make our families and communities places of human warmth and lasting peace — new Bethlehem cribs for our times. As we celebrate Christmas, may the heart of Jesus begin to beat in our hearts! And let us begin a new life in Christ as we welcome the New Year!

I wish each one of you the warmth and joy of Christmas and the deep comfort and lasting peace that come with the awareness that God is the guiding light of love on our life’s journey — Emmanuel (Matthew 1:23; 28:20).

Every prayer for a joyful Christmas and a blessed 2022!



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