

# Along the track

## The Gift of Christmas

*While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. (Luke 2:6 – 7)*

We are all so familiar with the Christmas scene that we can miss its powerful message. These two travellers from the north are lost among the crowds, desperately seeking a place of refuge, a place for Mary to give birth. But there's no room for them. 'Move on, nothing here'. Their first baby is born in very, very basic conditions, no fanfare, no family or friends around, no support. Just a stable filled with livestock. Did anyone assist at the birth? What preparations had they made? Some visitors arrive to welcome the baby but within hours Mary, Joseph and the new-born Jesus are on the road, refugees, fleeing for their lives.

This simple story invites us to look with the eyes of faith, otherwise this is just another destitute family in difficult circumstances. Our media is full of such scenes today. We cannot understand or even begin to grasp its significance without some faith. The celebration of Christmas invites us not to be so preoccupied with the gathering of gifts and chattels but to take some quiet time away from the frantic pace of life. Christmas invites us to ask ourselves, do we really believe what happened here and to ask why did it happen?

When we stop and reflect with the eyes of faith on this humble scene:

- we come to see that life is to be lived to the full, as a gift from a loving and generous God
- and so we can take to heart the words of Pope Francis, "A Christian is a man, or a woman, of joy: a man and a woman with joy in their heart. There is no Christian without joy!"
- we realise that love takes courage and commitment and that ultimately love triumphs over adversity
- we come to see in the miracle of life the connectedness of all people, that every person is made in God's image and in all our diversity, we are all daughters and sons of a loving God.

- and so we may come to see that we are called to work to overcome the things that divide us, that alienate us from one another, to challenge injustice, to find the lost, to heal those broken in spirit, to feed the hungry, to release the oppressed
- we may come to see that suffering and hardship are not part of God's plan but rather we in turn are invited to bring to life the healing work of Christ in our care for others
- we may work to ensure that the Church is seen not just as a social institution but rather the voice and presence of Christ in our world.

Christmas reminds us of *Emmanuel*, that *God-is-with-us*. But our world is not in good shape. Millions dispossessed, wars and devastation, starvation for many, selfishness, and bitterness linger. Racism is on the rise. The Christian, along with others can wonder where God is in all this. Where is God in this illness, this hurt, this injustice, this death, these broken dreams and promises? Where is God for the cold, hungry, and lonely?'

Emmanuel promises God's presence in our lives, that in all of this, God is with us. Christmas is a reminder that neither allowing ourselves to be overcome by the world's current direction or complacency that we can't do anything about it are sensible options. Maybe it is time to not dwell on where God seems silent or absent, but where God was present in our lives over the past twelve months, where God is now in our lives and in our world. That takes faith.

Knowing that God is with us can empower us to give up our anger, to forgive, to move beyond cynicism, bitterness, suspicion and jealousy. When we become more aware that God is with us, we can have the courage to reach out to others, to seek understanding, to work for change. Best of all, it helps us realise that reconciliation, peace and justice start with small steps, small gestures. Ours.

Regards  
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A Great Christmas Gift!

