

## Christmas 2005

By : RAFAEL HERNANDEZ COLON

Volume: 33 | No: 50

Page : 23

Issued : 12/22/2005

Some 2,000 years ago, something happened in the little town of Bethlehem that changed the course of history. The news of that happening has come down through the centuries. This good news, as the Gospels are called, changed the vision of human destiny that prevailed in the pagan world presided by the Roman Empire.

Humankind had evolved from the Ice Age to the fullness of time. The time when the ancient world would witness the birth of the Child to Joseph, a carpenter from a small village in Galilee, and his young wife Mary.

The good news that has come down to us, the news that changed the vision of humankind's destiny prevailing in the ancient world, is that this child is the Son of God; that by believing in Him, we will transcend the lonely grave, or nothingness, that awaits us, and will be ushered into life eternal.

This news can't be ignored. We must choose. To believe or not to believe, that is the question. This is the profound message of Christmas.

Believing, however, isn't a simple matter. It isn't saying, "Yes, I believe, and thus He will take me into eternity." It is saying, "Yes, I believe in Him, and my actions will be guided by Him and His message so I may follow Him into eternity." It is a profound conversion of mind, body, and soul that places us in another realm of reality. One in which the spiritual and the material converge. It is a most radical proposition, which will illuminate all the choices we make in life, although our choices sometimes, or many times, may turn out not to be the choices He would have made. The good news admits our failures; it only demands perseverance in pursuing the path we have chosen. "God gives us the task," proclaims an old Jewish saying, "He doesn't ask that we succeed, He asks only that we don't lay it aside."

As we celebrate Christmas 2005, we must keep this in mind. The birth of Jesus is a challenge. We can't remain indifferent after hearing the good news. We mustn't allow the parties, the gifts, the family reunions, the *aguinaldos* or carols to obscure the deeper meaning of Christmas. Our transcendence is at stake, and also the quality of our civilization.

The values that support our civilization come mostly from the wellspring of Christianity. The dignity of the human person, respect for our essential equality regardless of race, sex, color, or creed, our cherished freedoms, the need for tolerance, the primacy of love and solidarity are all values whose prevalence in Western civilization has its roots in the teachings and examples of Jesus Christ.

Christmas enhances these values. It brings us together. It is a time of joy and a time of love. It is a time of remembrance.

This is how the evangelist Luke describes the joyous event:

“About that time, the emperor Augustus ordered that a worldwide census be taken. ...Joseph and Mary had to be registered in their own town.

On that account, Joseph left the town of Nazareth in Galilee and went to Bethlehem in Judea, where king David was born, because Joseph was a descendent of David. He went there to register in the census, together with Mary his wife who was pregnant. And it happened that as they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to give birth. And there her first son was born, and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in the stable, because there was no room for them in the inn.

“Near Bethlehem, there were some shepherds that spent the night in the fields taking care of their sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone upon them and they were afraid. But, the angel said: ‘Don’t fear, because I bring you good news, which will be the cause of great joy for all. Today, there has been born a child in the town of David, who is the Messiah, the Lord. As a sign, you will find the child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a stable.’

“At that moment, there appeared together with the angel, many other angels from Heaven. They praised the Lord and said: “Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth among those who enjoy His favor.” Luke 2.

As we enjoy the nice things about Christmas, such as decorating our homes, putting up Christmas trees, going out to parties at our friends’ homes, and exchanging gifts, let us come closer to the deeper meaning of our celebration: the fullness of the revelation of God to humans through the incarnation of his Son in Mary, the Virgin.

This was the turning point in history. The humble birth of Jesus who would set out to convey to us the profound love of our Creator for each and everyone of us, so as to evoke in us the love for our Creator and for our fellow man or woman. The love that springs naturally from our hearts when we feel loved. The life of Jesus was one act of love, followed by another, and another, until the ultimate act of love when he gave up his life for us on the cross.

Christmas brings back that great gift of love that was given to us in Bethlehem. Each of us must respond one way or another. We may choose to ignore it, but if we do, we are cutting ourselves from the wellspring of the values that shape the quality of our lives and of our civilization.

These values made us into a generous, hospitable people. A people who, through their efforts, raised themselves up from poverty, who transformed this island from the poorhouse of the Caribbean to the prosperous society it is today. They are the values that installed solidarity and social justice into our

society, that affirm our identity as Puerto Ricans, that define us collectively as a civilization seeking its destiny on this island but open to the world.

The birth of Jesus is a challenge we must face to find the roots of our spirituality; to anchor ourselves; to provide sustenance to the values that enhance the quality of life on this beloved island.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, let our hearts receive the deeper meaning that comes from the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. It will give purpose to our lives and quality of life to Puerto Rico. Change begins at home, it begins with each and every one of us. May each one meet the challenge in the coming year. With the peace the Child brought into the world, Puerto Rico can go forward to places beyond our wildest dreams.

