

First of all let me wish each one of you Merry Christmas! May the Christ child draw you unto himself, bless and guide you in the year ahead.

We live in a time of tremendous uncertainties and hardships. With the demonetisation drive our 500 and 1000 rupee notes became defunct overnight. We are still struggling to get our own money as we have to stand in long queues and hop around on a treasure hunt to find out which ATM has money. The only ones who have taken our PM's plea to go cashless seems to be our ATM machine and our banks. The AAM AADMI has been greatly distressed because after standing in long queues they are only able to withdraw 2000 rupees. The daily wager, the poor and migrant worker are the ones who have borne the brunt of demonetisation. On the other hand we have huge amounts of money caught almost every day with the rich and the powerful who have their political clout or contacts in the bank. On the other hand our borders too are constantly attacked by terrorists. In the midst of all these uncertainties, hardship and hopelessness about life what does the message of Christmas have to say. This morning I would like us to focus on three key aspects where the good news of Jesus makes a difference.

One of the things we see in the midst of the birth of Jesus is that Caesar Augustus orders a census which makes Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem to be registered there. Even though it was a royal decree we see that God is in control of history. This is the first aspect that we learn from the birth of Jesus. No matter what kings, rulers and authorities may do, we need to understand that they are all under the sovereign control of God. For Mary and Joseph it brought about hardships because they had to travel from Galilee to Bethlehem which was a three day journey. But through this God fulfilled the prophesy of Micah that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. In a similar manner though we go through tremendous hardships because of demonetisation we must take courage that God is in control and he will fulfil his purpose. We may not be aware of what it is now but in the course of time we will know.

The second aspect that I would like us to focus on is the angelic message to the shepherds saying, "Don't be afraid I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people." The angel further says, "Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord." In Matthew's gospel Joseph is told they have to name their son Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. In the midst of all the bad news we read in our newspapers the good news is the coming of Christ. The word Saviour is usually referred to God who delivers his people from various types of peril: enemies that seek to destroy and disease that seeks to kill. Luke intends his readers to see the meaning in terms of rescue or delivery from peril, in both physical and spiritual senses. Jesus is the one who saves us from our sins. He is the one who brings God's salvation to us. The title that is applied to God is applied to Jesus who functions as the deliverer.

Why do we need the forgiveness of sins? In our own context when the Government's intention is to weed out black money through demonetisation, we hear and see daily reports of new currency being stored up in lakhs and crores. Corruption is rampant all over. The problem is with the human heart. That is why the prophet Jeremiah cried out, "the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)." So no matter how many laws we make to weed out corruption or make great efforts to remove it from our society we cannot do it. The good news is that Jesus is willing to forgive our past, give us a new start and also the power of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives.

Finally, the birth of Christ offers us peace. The angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests." While the Roman world may have been marked by external tranquillity, real peace comes through Jesus. Jesus offers us peace with God, peace with one another and peace within. This lasting peace of heart and mind comes from being reconciled to God. Peace with God is received by faith in Christ. While the offer of peace is for all people it is a gift that has to be received and accepted. We cannot achieve this peace by our good works or with our money. This peace must be received as a free gift.

As we conclude we are reminded to take courage because God is in control over kings and rulers. Secondly, we are given the good news that there is the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. Finally, in the midst of a turbulent world of uncertainties and hardships we are assured of God's peace. God Bless You All.

Merry Christmas.