

## Pastor Writes

First of all let me take this opportunity to wish your all a Merry Christmas and a prosperous and a blessed New Year. May the Christ child be with you as 'Emmanuel' during this season. We live in a time when our country is going through turbulent times and even more so as a Christian community. The world around has seen a lot of violent attacks by terrorists or by ISIS. In our country there have been terrorists who infiltrate our borders and seek to destroy the peace process by killing our soldiers. On the other side we also see internal strife as Maoists have killed a large number of CRPF men in recent days. There are also fundamentalist forces which are showing their ugly heads by burning Churches like St. Sebastian church in our city, or by intimidating people and converting them either by force or allurements.

The deliberate attempt to do 'Ghar Wapsi' on Christmas day is precisely to be a stench in our nostrils so that we would react violently to it and create communal unrest. Christian missionaries are not allowed to enter into Bastar (MP). Why is it so? Is India not a free country that her citizens can go to any part of our country? Are the local panchayats so strong that they can flout the Constitution of India? There is also a deliberate attempt to convert Christmas day as 'Good governance day' to make sure that schools and offices are kept open on Christmas. And now the PM's office sends circulars to make sure offices are working and good governance day is celebrated rather than Christmas. All these are not stray incidents but a deliberate ploy to divide and polarize. This is part of the package that is being unleashed not just against the minorities but against secular India with its multifaceted, colorful tapestry. This is a dangerous game plan bent on destroying the secular fabric of our country and therefore all of us as secular Indians need to stand up against this. How does the Christmas message speak to such a situation like this?

When Isaiah prophesied about the coming Messiah he spoke about him using four titles: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. Firstly he would be 'Wonderful Counselor'. Here we see that the King is our ruler who plans wonderful, astonishing things and is also in a position to accomplish those things. The Messiah helped by the Spirit's counsel would be able to make great decisions. In other words His great deeds would be seen in the way he works out his plan of salvation through the history of the nations. We can expect Him to perform extraordinary deeds within history and seek his deliverance. The challenge therefore for the Christian Community is that we seek this wonderful counsel from our Wonderful Counselor through prayer. So a Christian Community in situations like this is to come together to pray. Persecution is the greatest glue that brings the people together.

The second title used is 'Mighty God'. In other words it means God has the strength of a War Hero. We have seen the Mighty Hero or the Mighty God at work in the Exodus as he delivered His people from Egypt from bondage to freedom through His mighty acts. It is the same mighty God who is revealed to us through the Messiah Jesus. As a Christian Community we are to take courage that God's power is sufficient for us.

A third title he uses is 'Everlasting Father'. As a father God is interested in the whole of humanity and the whole world. That is why John says "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." God's love reaches out to all his people in our country no matter if people are persecuting us. We may remember that Saul who was persecuting the Christians in the 1st century was transformed by an encounter with the living Jesus and experienced his love. He went on to write almost half of the New Testament. We too are called to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. May we in this context understand that God's love is for all people and that we too should reach out in love.

Finally He is known as the 'Prince of Peace.' The coming of Christ is the first step in restoring the relationship which was broken in the Garden of Eden by Adam and Eve. God has provided a way back to Him through Christ. Through Christ he offers us the forgiveness of sins. When we receive Christ in our lives we have peace within ourselves as we begin this relationship with Him. And this peace will reach out to our neighbors as well. The world is desperately seeking peace. May we as His children be peace makers.

As we come to this Christmas let us remember that God is on the throne, Heaven rules! We need to go to Him for wonderful Counsel. He is the Father of all humanity and His love is for all. He is the Prince of Peace and has come to give us Peace. May the Joy and Peace of Christmas fill your hearts and minds during this season.

Shalom

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