



INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF CATHOLIC KNIGHTS

Apostles of the Third Millennium

Dear members of the International Alliance of Catholic Knights,

All too soon, another Christmas is with us. We are grateful to the Almighty God for seeing us through another year and bring us thus far. We join the people of faith around the world to celebrate the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ, the Ideal Knight. We recognize His birth as that, that changed all human history and gave a new meaning and purpose to our lives. Despite the humble appearances and events, we believe that in Bethlehem the Eternal Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary. This is why we celebrate Christmas.

The appeal of Christmas is not so much the truth that God entered our world and that divinity took on humanity, but the manner in which this was done. God could have become one like us, as a full-grown adult with a great display of power and majesty. Instead, God chose to come amid the most humble of circumstances, born of a simple village girl of Nazareth whose spouse could not even find a place for them to stay in their ancestral town-Bethlehem.

We know the story too well. For most of us it may have been part of our Christmas celebration from the time we could kneel as children before the crib in our homes. But things have certainly changed since the first Christmas celebration, when the heavenly choir filled the night with rejoicing, when humble shepherds on the hillside gazed in wonder at the heavenly hosts with their astonishing news, and later when the wise people, from the East, brought special gifts to the infant Jesus. God had become man. Light had come into the world. The Son of righteousness, the Son of God was born. The message was clear, the celebration was simple, pure and holy.

Today, the simple, pure and holy event is commercialized all over the world. This is the time that people buy and sell. We make trips to shopping centers and buildings. We go not only to buy but also to satisfy our deep desire to see new things, the latest fashions, and rub shoulders with our fellows. There are even those who would take the wonder out of the wonder story itself if they could. They dissect the language of the Bible to show that the writers did not really mean to say that Mary was a Virgin, but that she was merely a maiden. They would want to prove that the star that hovered over that place where the baby laid was not an unexplainable glow in the sky, but a conjunction of planets or a nova recorded by modern day astronomers, or something equally dull and reasonable.

In spite of our buying and selling, despite all the attempt to belittle the wonder at the center of the wonder story, Christmas will continue to fascinate us. Hence, we should allow it to speak to us, for Christmas has a wonder and a magic meant to cheer the heart and calls for reflection.

God became one like us that we may be raised from the dust to share God's very being; that we can be fully human endowed with the image of God. Therefore, Christmas reminds us, among other things, the dignity of the human race—Human life with which we are endowed, from the very moment of conception to the last moment of our lives. This is the duty that calls on us as knights for reverence, defense, love and solidarity with every human race.

When God took our form and become like us, God tore every veil. God exceeded every limit. God dazzled, God surprised everybody. When God took our form, God lifted our human selves and brought us joy. This is why we will always need Christmas, for it teaches us that from that night in the stable at Bethlehem, God has continued for many thousands of nights and days to reveal the Godself to humanity.

Our God did not stay in the heavens aloof from our troubled humanity. God took on flesh and became one of us, God experienced human life and redeemed it. God was infinitely better than anyone of us could imagine. God was young, tender, understanding, cheerful, like a child-happy. God was God.

We expected a judge, an avenger, an executioner, but it was a Child who was born, telling us to become innocent, humble, pure and new. We may have been preparing for the rendering of accounts, we were going to put ourselves right with God, but a baby was born stretching out his arms to us asking for our love, protection and tenderness. All the confidence we never dared to have in God, God had in us.

Therefore, the message of Christmas is that God went through our human life so that we can hold on to God's divine self at all times. God does not lack sympathy towards us. God understands everything we go through because God has experienced it before. God's salvation means more than simply getting to heaven. It is also an experience of coping victoriously with life here and now.

Our God came into this world in the poorest human condition you can imagine. Such a coming gives us hope, (in the Year of Hope), even when we have to face the poverty, oppression, violence, racism, tribalism and the other problems that plaque our world.

Christmas tells us that despite whatever is wrong with us we have the forgiveness and help of the One who so loved the world so much that he gave us his only Son that whoever believe in him may never be lost but have life eternal. So, we as knights, cannot cover the Child Jesus up like we want him for our selfish keeping. We must allow the Elizabeths, the Zacharias, the Simeons, the Annas, the Shepherds, the wise people from the East and all wanting to get in touch with the Child Jesus, to come and experience the wonder of Christmas. This can be done through the way we reach out to others.

This Christmas, bring the baby out of the manger to people who are sick or burdened. Bring him to young people whose bodies are ruined with drugs and alcohol. Bring the baby to transform married couples whose relationships have grown cold. Bring him to older people who think that life is over that they may have meaning and purpose in life. Bring the Child Jesus to people who are faced with sudden tragedies, traumatic experiences, divorce, etc., with their dreams shattered, so that they will find hope and new beginning in life. We will have to take Jesus out of the manger and allow him to pervade every aspect of our lives;

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

+John Opoku-Agyemang

International Chaplain.