

THE CHRISTMAS VIGIL AND CHRISTMAS DAY; Dec 24&25, 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Among the major religions like, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism only Christianity believes in the Incarnation God in the human form of Jesus. Though Judaism believes in the Incarnation of God coming down in the form of the Messiah, they don't accept Jesus as the Messiah. Islam totally denies the Incarnation of Jesus, though it respects him as a great Prophet. On the other hand Hinduism has no objection to believe in the Incarnation Jesus. For Hinduism believes in 10 types of the incarnation of their god, Vishnu. According to its belief Vishnu has to take the incarnation time to time with specific reason. The Hindu Sacred Book, Bhagavat Gita (Song of God) explains clearly the purpose of the incarnation of Vishnu. It says, **“Whenever the wickedness increases in the world, to protect the righteous, to destroy the wicked, and to re-establish the principles of religion, god Vishnu appears on this earth, age after age; but in different forms.**

At the same time we have to notice a fundamental difference between Christianity and Hinduism regarding the theology of Incarnation. Hinduism holds the belief that **god Vishnu takes the incarnation to protect the righteous and to destroy the wicked.** But Jesus came not to destroy the wicked; rather to convert and save them. Jesus says in Luke 5: 31-32, **“Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners.”** It doesn't mean that he has totally discards the righteous; rather he means that the righteous are already in the list of the saved. If we go through the message of John regarding the purpose of the Incarnation, it is clear that Jesus came for everybody. John says in chapter 3:16, **“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but might have eternal life. For, God did not send his Son to condemn world, but that the world might be saved.”** On this great truth, we totally disagree with the Hindu view. Before the eyes of God both the righteous and the wicked are His children. He doesn't take pleasure in destroying a wicked; rather his conversion.

Jesus is the embodiment of the unconditional love and compassion of God. If we go through the gospel accounts we see quite a few occasions when Jesus was compassionate towards the so called condemned ones. To the shock of every good Jew, Jesus called Matthew the tax collector, who was labeled as a public sinner, to be his disciple; he went and stayed in the house of Zachaeus another tax collector. He saved a prostitute woman from being stoned to death. His kind words to her, **“Nor do I condemn you; go, sin no more”**- lifted her from the mire of sin and made her a faithful follower. He allowed a sinful woman to touch his feet and wash them with her tears or repentance.

At the last hour of his life on the cross he could change the life of the revolutionary who was crucified with him. Only Jesus could do such kind acts, for he was the most compassionate God. He didn't come down to condemn us but to love us and save us.

What is the message of Christmas? It gives us the message of God's love and generosity which led Him to give us His only Son as the greatest gift to us. Jesus, as our Savior, brought the "Good News" through his works and teaching that our God is not a God who will wait for the wickedness to mount up in the world so that he could come down with his sword of vengeance. **Instead, God is a loving, forgiving, merciful, rewarding God and not a judgmental, cruel, punishing God.** Jesus demonstrated by his life and teaching how God our Heavenly Father loves us, forgives us, provides for us, and rewards us. All his miracles were signs of this Divine Love. Jesus' final demonstration of God's love for us was his death on the cross to atone for our sins and to make us children of God.

Each Christmas reminds us that sharing love with others is our Christian privilege and duty, and every time when we do that, Jesus is reborn in our lives. Let us humbly admit the truth with the German mystic *Angelus Silesius* "**Christ could be born a thousand times in Bethlehem – but all in vain until He is born in me.**" It is the great truth, "**When we love each other, God is born in our hearts; when we hate each other God dies in our hearts.**" Hence, let us allow Jesus to be reborn in our hearts and lives, not only during Christmas, but every day, so that he may radiate the Light of his presence from within us.

If today, millions of non-Christians respect Jesus with high esteem, it is because of his love for mankind. If today, Jesus lives in the hearts of millions of people, because he is the God of love, forgiveness and compassion. He is the one who gives his light and rain to both the righteous and wicked. Only he can love us as we are with all our shortcomings.

Christmas is also the time to restore our broken relationships, to repair strained ones, and to forgive offences done against us. Forgiveness is the name of love in a wounded world. When we feel rejected, abandoned, manipulated, or violated especially by people very close to us, we feel forgiveness from the heart difficult. God who takes our form and becomes one like us will give us the grace to go beyond our wounded selves and say: "**In the name of God you are forgiven.**"