

## Meditators' Blog 15/12/2011



**Christmas ? the experience of inner joy** by *Christopher Mendonca*

The purpose of religious narratives in the Scriptures is not so much to be historical as to provide us with starting points for our own spiritual journey. It is with this in mind that we might not only read the scriptures to gain insights for ourselves, but rather allow ourselves to be read by them.

The making present of what we read allows for the timelessness of Sacred Scripture. The Christmas story in this sense is also our story and the characters represent us in various ways at different points on our spiritual journey. In the Christmas narrative, the innkeeper is only mentioned by default. ?There was no room for them at the inn?. It is a single short crisp sentence, devoid of emotion, a statement of fact. But then, every scripture says much more by what it does not say than by what it actually says. The spirit goes far beyond the letter.

The infancy narrative does not describe the emotional turmoil of the innkeeper in refusing Mary and Joseph room at the inn. Rather by a description of the unalloyed joy of the shepherds and sense of awe that they experience it points to what the innkeeper may have missed. Dated at the time of the Winter solstice, there was an obvious mood of celebration all around. It was late that night, almost closing time. The sounds of revelry and celebrations could be heard and his heart leaped with delight... until, he heard that fateful knock. A young couple, she expecting to deliver her first baby at any moment, sought accommodation at the inn. From the looks of them, they could ill afford to pay. And when he noticed she was pregnant that sealed their fate. There was no room for them at the inn. He did not want to spoil the party, nor did he want to tarnish his reputation allowing his premises to be used for what he thought suspicious. He watched them disappear into the stillness of the night.

A few days later, he would only rue what he had missed. It was obvious that an event of enormous significance had taken place. Had he missed out on a chance to be at the heart of it all.? The Scriptures make no mention of any bitterness on the part of Mary and Joseph. There is no place for resentment in the hearts of those who experience inner joy. This young couple seemed to have a sense of joy anticipating an event so great that the suffering of the present moment would pale into insignificance before the glory of what awaited them. The simple acceptance of his refusal was mirrored in their eyes. There is no mention of even a

whimper of protest against the denial of what might legitimately be their right. The verses that follow describe a joy that bears no resemblance to the plastic smiles of the revellers. The paucity of words to describe it points to the emptiness of the celebrations at the inn. It was a far cry from the joy that the couple experienced even as she laid down the new-born child in a manger.

The chorus of celebrating voices is often a cacophony that masks inner discord and disharmony. The couple had on the other hand gone away with a song in their hearts, blending their inner voices into an exquisite harmony most unusual, and hardly ever heard. Amid all the noise and celebration, there began to echo within their hearts the strains of that ?Silent Night?

We often overlook the simplicity of that first Christmas only to bask in the reflected glory of shining baubles rather than the Light of the World. The deafening cacophony of the noise of our celebration shuts us off from the Silence of that Holy Night. This Christmas we need not ease our inner pain in the mere celebration of joyful noise. We could instead heed the invitation to relish an inner silence. Like the innkeeper it needn't be a lost opportunity. With Mary and Joseph we can begin to pay attention to and recognise the LORD's presence with and within us. In the company of the shepherds we can truly experience a communion with one another. Like the wise men, in our search for stars and superstars we could actually begin to notice the Star of Bethlehem and experience the inner peace and joy that Christmas is really all about.

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