

CHRISTMAS - THE FORGOTTEN MAN

Christmas is all about God fulfilling his promise that one day he would undo the harm of the sin of Adam and Eve when they deliberately disobeyed God and ate of the fruit of the tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden at the beginnings of the human race. They had everything going for them and God gave them only one restriction. "Do not eat the fruit of the tree of good and evil, the tree of knowledge. It seemed such a simple restriction yet when the devil came and tempted Eve to go ahead and eat it though she knew what God has said, she went ahead anyway and ate of the fruit. And then being human she wanted company in her act and enticed Adam to eat it also. Sin entered into the world and the consequences were immediate. Now they would die for they lost the gift of immortality; they lost their innocence and then were told that they could no longer live in the Garden of Eden. They proclaimed their fault and asked for forgiveness, but there was no way that they could make up for the evil they had done since they were in no way equal to God.

From that point on man went from bad to worse, but God was not about to give up on his creation. As the human race grew he finally called a man named Abram, changed his name to Abraham and told him that he would be the father of a new race of people dear to God. Then through the next twenty centuries he formed a people he would call his own and sent numerous messengers to teach them that there was only one God and that he would make of them a great nation. Then at the appointed time God set into motion his ultimate plan of salvation: he would send his Son to become a human being and as a human being who was equal to God in every way, he would teach them a new way of living, a new way of believing, and would ultimately give his life as the price of man's redemption.

In a small town of Nazareth, there lived a couple, Joachim and Ann who had only one child, a girl they named Mary. There was nothing extraordinary about this little family. They were an honest, hard working couple, strong and very faithful in the practice of their faith. Not too far from them was another very good Jewish family who had a son named Joseph. His father Jacob, was of the line of David, the greatest king Israel ever had and so his lineage really went way back to the time of Abraham and God's original promise that he would one day save his people.

How Joseph and Mary first met is not recorded, but both being close in age and living somewhat close together it was very natural for them to get to know each other, and as time when on they both eventually fell in love. It must have been a wonderful day when Joseph finally asked Mary to be his wife, and even a more wonderful day when she said yes. Neither of them had any idea of just how their lives would now change. Being engaged, they went through all the proper things necessary and dictated in their society to do everything right. There was some ceremony in getting engaged with a promise to marry, but they could not live together until later when the final marriage would take place. One can just imagine how happy they must have been and how they looked forward to having their own family.

But then God stepped into their lives in a totally unexpected way and life would never again be the same. Where Mary was when she was suddenly aware of another presence in the room we do not know, but she was quite surprised. She sensed that the stranger was somehow from God and

she was almost speechless in listening to him as he told her that she had been chosen by God to give birth to a Son, who would be the promised one spoken of by all the prophets. For a moment Mary was confused for she knew of only one way to have a child and for the moment she was not yet fully married. It was then that the Angel told her it would be from God alone. When she realized that all she had to do was to accept God's invitation, she immediately said yes. And at that moment, God became a man. The angel then gave her some proof of what was to happen by telling her that her cousin, Elizabeth, was six months pregnant, and she was in her eighties!

Mary believed and she immediately set out to help her cousin in her advanced years, and stayed three months helping her. When she came back home, she now faced a very difficult problem. She couldn't hide her pregnancy and there was no way she could tell Joseph what happened. He would never believe her. And Joseph, so anxious to see her after three months away, suddenly realized that she indeed was pregnant. His life was suddenly shattered. How could this have happened? One can only imagine the sleepless nights, the pain of a shattered love, the hint of a betrayal. Yet his love was such that he determined he would break his engagement in a way that would protect the girl he loved the most. Only then did God intervene, sending him an angel in the night to tell him that Mary had done nothing wrong, it was all God's doing! Just imagine the next morning when Joseph went as early as possible to meet Mary and tell her he now knew what had happened, and for the first time Mary could really explain to Joseph the true story. How their love must have grown and filled their lives.

Joseph accepted Mary into his home and most people who knew them said little about the pregnancy, though some must certainly have wondered. And Joseph also knew that the son to be born was not his, but was indeed from God, and that now he would be a foster father, not the real father. But the true greatness of Joseph comes forth in his acceptance of the work of God. Just as Mary had given her total yes, so too did Joseph give his total yes to God, never quite knowing just what was going on. From that point on his life was indeed changed with so many little but very important events taking place one after another - the census and the trip to Bethlehem when Mary was just about to give birth, no place to stay, only a small cave used by shepherds to protect their flock from driving rain. Then suddenly out of nowhere, three sages from the east with kingly gifts, then a threat to kill the baby and now Joseph has to quickly flee to Egypt to protect Mary and her son. One thing after another, all suddenly out of the blue! But Joseph never complained and he did his best to be the greatest father ever to fulfill his promise to his wife, Mary and also to his God. Joseph was indeed a very great man. He died in his twenties before he ever saw his son begin his journey of redemption.

Fr. Andy, S.J.