



Christmas will soon be upon us. What a very special time... a time of hope, of joy, of sharing and of getting together to celebrate all the blessings that we have received, family and friendships being such a large part of these blessings.

We send you, our friends, colleagues and spiritual community warm hugs of gratitude and cheer filled smiles.

We wish each of you a Blessed Advent.. a Merry Christmas and a New Year filled with HEALTH both physical and spiritual.
Let us together thank God for the gift of LIFE and of FAITH.

*Bernard & Ginette Charbonneau and Father Kevin Maloney,
Executive Coordinators, International Catholic Engaged Encounter.*



As we approach another Christmas and the end of another year, let us look back with gratitude to God for the many favours he has granted us and our families; even the trying times can be instances of blessings if we keep our faith and our eyes focused on our Lord and Saviour. As we commemorate His miraculous birth, let us allow Christ to be born in every area of our lives that needs His illumination, that need touching with His grace. Let us share with all we meet that joy of new life that we have been given in Christ, and work tirelessly to be channels of His peace and goodwill to ALL persons.



Anthony and Angela Mitchell, National Coordinating Team, CEE, Trinidad and Tobago



The True Message of Christmas

“Rejoice, Rejoice Emanuel has come to thee O Israel”

The true message of Christmas is found in Luke’s Gospel, chapter two, in the fifteenth verse. There we have the account of Jesus’ birth. In the following Scripture we have the shepherds as they go to Bethlehem. In the true message of Christmas the shepherds came to see this thing the angels said had come to pass, “That unto you is born in the City of David, a savior which is Christ The Lord”. They came and they saw, then went forth glorifying and praising God, telling others what they had seen and heard.

Man’s praise and worship of God for the revelation of His glory that night has not ceased. Neither has the skeptic’s doubt; the mocker’s scorn; the profession’s criticisms; the public’s apathy; the crowd’s scorn; the pagan’s blasphemy; the executioner’s sword; the Devil’s lies; however none have diminished the hope that was born that night. Nor has it dimmed the glorious dawn of His glory that continues to radiate down through the years, and envelopes your heart and mine.

The true message of Christmas is that Eternal God came to earth in the form of man, in order to save His own creation. It was necessary because fallen man is mired in sin, and there is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood. In order to show that, this tiny babe in swaddling clothes came for a purpose, the manger and the cross must be seen together. He came to die for my sins, your sins, and for the sins of the whole



world. The small infant’s hands that were later nailed to a rugged wooden cross, are the hands that so often lovingly reach down and pick us up during the many difficulties of life. The One we see in the manger is fully God, who came to earth with a purpose; to die so that you and I could have forgiveness of our sins, so that we would receive the greatest gift of all. Your best Christmas comes not from the gaily wrapped presents under the Christmas tree, but from the One wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a wooden manger in the town of Bethlehem, the One who’s birthday we celebrate.

2 Corinthians 2:15—Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. Bethlehem’s manger crib bound a lost world to a loving God. When you see a manger scene and the baby, think beyond the babe, to His reason for coming. Make the effort to remember the real message of Christmas and His undying love for you, and remember His hands.

So again “Rejoice, Rejoice for God has come to us.

Adapted from Faye Byrd

<http://www.trusting-in-jesus.com/True-Message-of-Christmas.html>

“For outlandish creatures like us, on our way to a heart, a brain, and courage, Bethlehem is not the end of our journey but only the beginning - not home but the place through which we must pass if ever we are to reach home at last.”

~Frederick Buechner ~





The Christmas Truce

by David G. Stratman

It was December 25, 1914, only 5 months into World War I. German, British, and French soldiers, already sick and tired of the senseless killing, disobeyed their superiors and fraternized with "the enemy" along two-thirds of the Western Front (a crime punishable by death in times of war). German troops held Christmas trees up out of the trenches with signs, "Merry Christmas." "You no shoot, we no shoot." Thousands of troops streamed across a no-man's land strewn with rotting corpses. They sang Christmas carols, exchanged photographs of loved ones back home, shared rations, played football, even roasted some pigs. Soldiers embraced men they had been trying to kill a few short hours before. They agreed to warn each other if the top brass forced them to fire their weapons, and to aim high.

"I heard the bells on Christmas Day
 Their old, familiar carols play,
 And wild and sweet
 The words repeat
 Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"
 ~Henry Wadsworth Longfellow ~

A shudder ran through the high command on either side. Here was disaster in the making: soldiers declaring their brotherhood with each other and refusing to fight. Generals on both sides declared this spontaneous peacemaking to be treasonous and subject to court martial. By March 1915, the fraternization movement had been eradicated and the killing machine put back in full operation. By the time of the armistice in 1918, fifteen million would be slaughtered.

Not many people have heard the story of the Christmas Truce. On Christmas Day, 1988, a story in the *Boston Globe* mentioned that a local FM radio host played "Christmas in the Trenches," a ballad about the

Christmas Truce, several times and was startled by the effect. The song became the most requested recording during the holidays in Boston, on several FM stations. "Even more startling than the number of requests I get is the reaction to the ballad afterward by callers who hadn't heard it before," said the radio host. "They telephone me deeply moved, sometimes in tears, asking, 'What the hell did I just hear?'"

You can probably guess why the callers were in tears. The Christmas Truce story goes against most of what we have been taught about people. It gives us a glimpse of the world as we wish it could be and says, "This really happened once." It reminds us of those thoughts we keep hidden away, out of range of the TV and newspaper stories, that tell us how trivial and mean human life is. It is like hearing that our deepest wishes really are true: the world really could be different

Excerpt from *We Can Change the World*

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father,
 The Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6





On Santa's Team

Author Unknown

My grandma taught me everything about Christmas. I was just a kid. I remember tearing across town on my bike to visit her on the day my big sister dropped the bomb: "There is no Santa Claus," jeered my sister. "Even dummies know that!" My grandma was not the gushy kind, never had been. I fled to her that day because I knew she would be straight with me. I knew Grandma always told the truth, and I knew that the truth always went down a whole lot easier when swallowed with one of her world-famous cinnamon buns.

Grandma was home, and the buns were still warm. Between bites, I told her everything. She was ready for me. "No Santa Claus!" she snorted. "Ridiculous! Don't believe it. That rumor has been going around for years, and it makes me mad, plain mad. Now, put on your coat, and let's go." "Go? Go where, Grandma?" I asked. I hadn't even finished my second cinnamon bun. "Where" turned out to be Kerby's General Store, the one store in town that had a little bit of just about everything. As we walked through its doors, Grandma handed me ten dollars. That was a bundle in those days. "Take this money," she said, "and buy something for someone who needs it. I'll wait for you in the car." Then she turned and walked out of Kerby's.

I was only eight years old. I'd often gone shopping with

"Mankind is a great, an immense family... This is proved by what we feel in our hearts at Christmas."

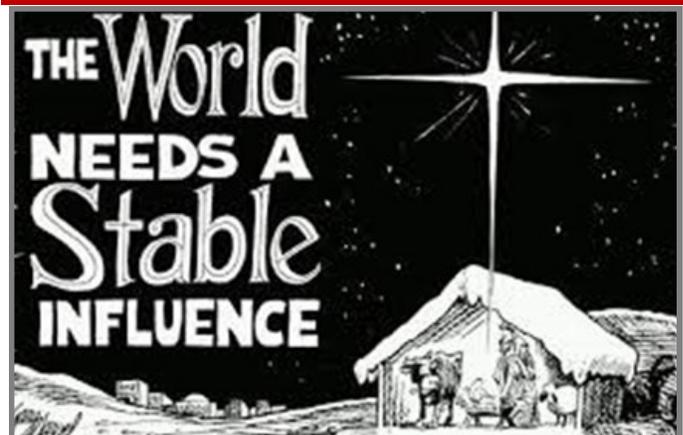
~Pope John XXIII~

my mother, but never had I shopped for anything all by myself. The store seemed big and crowded, full of people scrambling to finish their Christmas shopping. For a few moments I just stood there, confused, clutching that ten-dollar bill, wondering what to buy, and who on earth to buy it for. I thought of everybody I knew: my family, my friends, my neighbors, the kids at school, the people who went to my church. I was just about thought out, when I suddenly thought of Bobbie Decker.



He was a kid with bad breath and messy hair, and he sat right behind me in Mrs. Pollock's grade-two class. Bobbie Decker didn't have a coat. I knew that because he never went out for recess during the winter. His mother always wrote a note, telling the teacher that he had a cough; but all we kids knew that Bobbie Decker didn't have a cough, and he didn't have a coat. I fingered the ten-dollar bill with growing excitement. I would buy Bobbie Decker a coat. I settled on a red corduroy one that had a hood to it. It looked real warm, and he would like that. I didn't see a price tag, but ten dollars ought to buy anything. I put the coat and my ten-dollar bill on the counter and pushed them toward the lady behind it. She looked at the coat, the money, and me. "Is this a Christmas present for someone?" she asked kindly. "Yes," I replied shyly. "It's ... for Bobbie. He's in my class, and he doesn't have a coat." The nice lady smiled at me. I didn't get any change, but she put the coat in a bag and wished me a Merry Christmas.

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SACRAMENTO LUTHERAN SOCIETY

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That evening, Grandma helped me wrap the coat in Christmas paper and ribbons, and write, "To Bobbie, From Santa Claus" on it ... Grandma said that Santa always insisted on secrecy. Then she drove me over to Bobbie Decker's house, explaining as we went that I was now and forever officially one of Santa's helpers. Grandma parked down the street from Bobbie's house, and she and I crept noiselessly and hid in the bushes by his front walk. Suddenly, Grandma gave me a nudge. "All right, Santa Claus," she whispered, "get going." I took a deep breath, dashed for his front door, threw the present down on his step, pounded his doorbell twice and flew back to the safety of the bushes and Grandma. Together we waited breathlessly in the darkness for the front door to open. Finally it did, and there stood Bobbie. He looked down, looked around, picked up his present, took it inside and closed the door.

Forty years haven't dimmed the thrill of those moments spent shivering, beside my grandma, in Bobbie Decker's bushes. That night, I realized that those awful rumors about Santa Claus were just what Grandma said they were: Ridiculous! Santa was alive and well ... AND WE WERE ON HIS TEAM!



"A Christmas candle is a lovely thing; It makes no noise at all, But softly gives itself away; While quite unselfish, it grows small."

~Eva K. Logue~



Suffering can have the effect of making God seem far away, removed from our concerns or indifferent to our cries. Christmas reminds us that God has come close to us, that he desires, as John Paul II often puts it, to walk the path of life with each one of us. Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God with us. When even worldly peace seems so difficult to achieve, we can draw strength from that promise of peace in the message of the angels: peace on earth to men of good will. It is a peace the world cannot give, but also one that the world cannot take away.

~Jorge Garcia~

http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/rvp/pubaf/chronicle/v10/d13/christmas.html



A Christmas Message

From John Lennox

We celebrate an awesome event that has inspired great literature, music, poetry and architecture. The message of Christ has transformed countless lives, spawned hospitals, hospices and universities. It has abolished slavery and brought dignity to human life. As our Prime Minister recently said: “Christianity has had immense historic influence in the development of our culture and national institutions...we are a country with a Christian heritage and we should not be afraid to say so.”

Cosmologists tell us that 13.5 billion years ago the universe was smaller than a grain of sand – a mind stretching fact, yet one that pales into insignificance besides the realisation that 20 centuries ago the God who created the universe became a tiny seed in the womb of a humble young woman. The Word became flesh. God who had made man in His own image himself became human.

The incarnation of God challenges the atheist belief that this universe is a closed system of cause and effect. We are told that at the time of Christ credulous people could believe in such miraculous happenings, since they did not know the laws of nature. Now, in our enlightened scientific age this is impossible since miracles violate the laws of nature. The biblical records of them are just fantasies like Father Christmas.



There are three errors here. Firstly, the comparison with Father Christmas is trivially false. I have never

known an adult who came to believe in Father Christmas. I have known many adults who came to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Secondly, two of those adults are key figures in the Christmas narrative, Mary and Joseph. They were not credulous people. They knew as well as we do, the basic laws of nature regarding where babies come from. So, when Mary was told by the angel that she would conceive, she protested: “How shall this be, since I do not know a man?” And we have just read how Joseph, on discovering Mary was pregnant, planned to divorce her. He, a devout and righteous man, was just not prepared to believe her account of a miraculous conception. Yet both of them were eventually persuaded that there was nothing immoral about the conception of Jesus, by being given convincing evidence that the child had been supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit in a direct intervention by God.

“I truly believe that if we keep telling the Christmas story, singing the Christmas songs, and living the Christmas spirit, we can bring joy and happiness and peace to this world.”

~Norman Vincent Peale~

Thirdly, people are wrong when they say that miracles like the incarnation cannot occur because they violate the laws of nature. What, after all, are those laws? They are our descriptions of what normally happens and they enable us to predict what will happen if no-one intervenes. However, God is not a prisoner of the laws that describe the regularities that He has built in to the cosmos. It is therefore no act of violation, if he intervenes in his own creation. For such intervention breaks no laws.

Suppose I put \$100 in my hotel drawer last night and I put in another \$100 tonight. The laws of arithmetic say that I have \$200 in the drawer. If I find only \$50 there tomorrow, what do I conclude? That the laws of arithmetic have been broken or the laws of the land? Clearly the laws of the land. How do I know that? Because I know the laws of arithmetic. They have not been broken, and that is what tells me that a thief has come in from outside. Cont'd on page 7



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Similarly, when a genuine miracle takes place, it is the laws of nature that alert us to the fact that it is a miracle. If we did not know the laws, we should never recognise a miracle if we saw one. Science therefore cannot rule out miracle. The universe is not a closed system. This world is not the only world there is.

C. S. Lewis wrote: "If God creates a miraculous spermatozoon in the body of a virgin, it does not proceed to break any laws. The laws at once take over. Nature is ready. Pregnancy follows, according to all the normal laws, and nine months later a child is born".

What is more, the prophet Isaiah wrote something that science could never have told him. Inspired by God he foretold Christ's coming not nine months but six centuries before it happened: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting

"He who has not Christmas in his heart will never find it under a tree."
~Roy L. Smith~

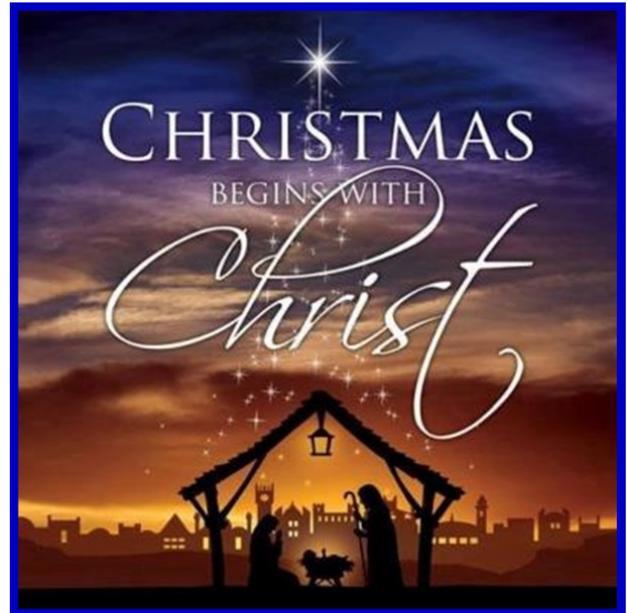
Father and the Prince of Peace." These words, full of deep and powerful mystery, ring true precisely because they are true.

"Unto us a Son is given..."

Christmas is a special time of exchanging gifts as expressions of love, affection or gratitude. It is, however, possible for someone to accept a gift and yet reject the giver. Imagine you have invited guests to a Christmas dinner. Your guests eat the food with relish, talk to each other animatedly but say nothing to you. They leave without a word of thanks. An impossible situation, you say? Yet that is precisely how many of us have treated God this past year. We have taken his

gifts of health, ability, job, home, food, family and friends, but we have never stopped to acknowledge or thank him. We have accepted the gifts but rejected the Giver.

"Unto us a Son is given..." Here the gift is the Giver. We cannot reject it without rejecting him. And he is the Saviour of the world.



There is much good in the world but there is also much evil – poverty, suffering, violence, war, exploitation, slavery, fear, discrimination and abuse. And who of us would dare suggest that there is nothing from which we need to be saved – anger, lovelessness, destructive desires, egocentricity, greed, spite, envy, dishonesty and hypocrisy to name but a few? Surely we would agree with G K Chesterton who in response to a question in the Times: "What is wrong with the world?" wrote to the Editor: "Dear Sir, I am, Yours faithfully, G K Chesterton.

C. S. Lewis wrote: "If God creates a miraculous spermatozoon in the body of a virgin, it does not proceed to break any laws."

Are we therefore doomed to live in a world in which "it is always winter and never Christmas"? No – because Christmas has indeed come. Into our world God speaks a message full of hope: "You shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins".

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How is it to be done? Not, you will be glad to know, by suggesting another round of unrealistic New Year's resolutions. Moral codes are very important, but they cannot either forgive us or empower us to live as we know we ought. Christ can forgive because he died for us. And Christ can empower us to live because he rose from the dead.

But, it will be said, it makes no moral sense for one man to give himself for another's sins? There is force to that objection if Jesus were merely a man. But Jesus was never only a man. He was God incarnate. Because Jesus is both God and man he can offer us salvation as a gift – forgiveness, peace with God, new life and hope. Like all gifts it has to be received – in this case by the deliberate and willing act of repentance and trust in Christ.

John Lennox is a professor of Mathematics at Oxford University and a renowned international speaker on the interface between science philosophy and religion. Adapted from an address by John Lennox, Dec 2013] <http://johnlennox.org/jresources/a-christmas-message-from-john-lennox/>

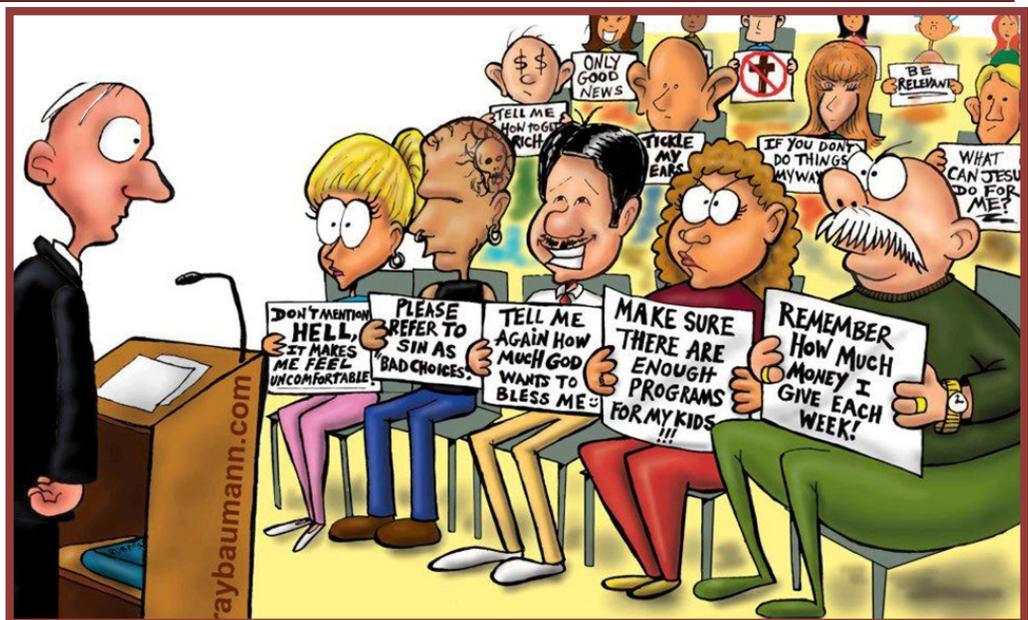


“And when we give each other Christmas gifts in His name, let us remember that He has given us the sun and the moon and the stars, and the earth with its forests and mountains and oceans-- and all that lives and move upon them. He has given us all green things and everything that blossoms and bears fruit and all that we quarrel about and all that we have misused--and to save us from our foolishness, from all our sins, He came down to earth and gave us Himself.”
~Sigrid Undset~

“If you desire to find the true spirit of Christmas and partake of the sweetness of it, let me make this suggestion to you. During the hurry of the festive occasion of this Christmas season, find time to turn your heart to God. Perhaps in the quiet hours, and in a quiet place, and on your knees—alone or with loved ones—give thanks for the good things that have come to you, and ask that His Spirit might dwell in you as you earnestly strive to serve Him and keep His commandments. He will take you by the hand and His promises will be kept.”
~Howard W. Hunter~



“Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love.”
~Hamilton Wright Mabie~



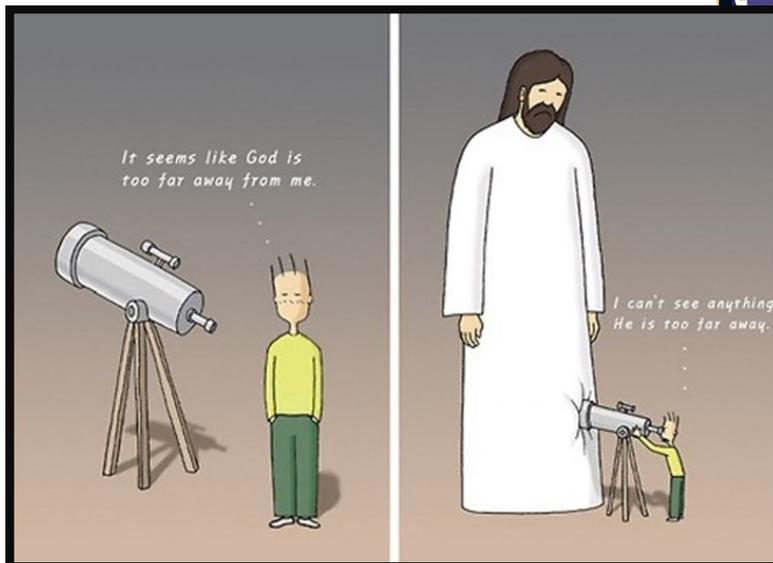


CEETT 2013 Roundup

CEETT ministry continued to be blessed this year, 2013. We were gifted with, and in one instant, purchased multimedia equipment, which allowed us to continue to present our couple sharings in varied ways.

For the spiritual sustenance of our core ministry members we had our Lenten retreat; the theme was "Living our Faith through Marriage" where we focused on aspects of our marriage such as the call to holiness, the necessity to constantly allow ourselves to be perfected by God, Mary as our role model and living our marriages as an example for others to follow.

We also had two Recalls, one on June 23rd, attended by some 47 couples. The Recall focused on the importance of sharing our time, talents and treasure with community, as a necessary call of our Sacrament. We also convened another Recall on October 12th and were blessed to have the international speaker on family life issues, Dr. James Healy, share with us on "How to be Married and Stay Engaged" and lead a discussion on "Marriage preparation in the Modern Era". Sixty couples attended; couples who had experienced an Engaged Encounter weekend, and couples involved in weekly marriage preparation sessions throughout the country.



In August, we had a rest and relaxation weekend for core ministry couples. We were however unable to convene our regular Christmas luncheon, due to circumstances beyond our control.

We now have a new Spiritual Director, Fr. Derek Anton, upon whom we invoke God's special blessings, as he takes up his role with the CEETT team.

We continue to be pleased with the eagerness of young couples to assist in the Ministry and we pray that this will become a permanent commitment as we move into 2014, that the Lord will raise up a new generation to continue His work in the all Family Life ministries!

Christmas is the season for kindling the fire of hospitality in the hall, the genial flame of charity in the heart."
~ Washington Irving (1783-1859)~

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). Matthew 1:23



Christmas is not as much about opening our presents as opening our hearts."
~Janice Maeditere ~