

Christmas 2020: Memorial of The Birth of The Messiah

We celebrate *the memorial* of the birth of Jesus Christ (Heb. Yeshua ha Mashiach) on December 25 each year. We could just as easily celebrate *the memorial* on another date in another month and it would not make a difference. The point is we are celebrating *the memorial* of His birth. I say this because there are scholars who believe Jesus was born the 10th of Nisan, April, at the time Passover lambs are chosen for the sacrifice. We celebrate this time as Easter, the memorial of His crucifixion as Lamb of God and saving act of love to satisfy the justice of God so that we could live in His mercy if we choose to accept Him in faith.

The Jewish Talmud is an accrued commentary on how the application of the Torah, the Law of God given to us through Moses, is to be observed. This book had become so legalistic that it added commands that God had not created. By the time of Jesus birth, the Rabbinical laws mandated special flocks to raise lambs for the Passover sacrifice in order to rule out the chance of sinful defects in the lambs. The lamb had to be perfect.

Jesus, the perfect lamb of God, was born in Bethlehem, located about 5 ½ miles from Jerusalem. There were no such flocks with spring lambs in December but there were the days leading up to Passover in Nisan (April). I wrote that on December 25 we “celebrate *the memorial*.” The word “memorial” comes from the Hebrew word “zakarh” which cognates into several words with connected meaning. In this instance we define it as “to remember” yet not as in remembering something from the past but as *reexperiencing that which is called to mind*. So, in the Christmas liturgy we are invited by grace to open our hearts to the gift of the Father giving His only begotten new born Son, Jesus Christ (Yeshua ha Mashiach) (John 3:16-22). Jesus is the ‘assumed’ flesh of the Blessed and Immaculate Mother who brought Him forth in joy, not pain, she having been freed from original sin and espoused to the Holy Spirit in a graced, unique, magnificent way. Here was the Divine Person of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, born into the world through the flesh of the Virgin Mother and living as a Divine Person with a human nature and a Divine Nature. He was equal to God in His Divine Nature and inferior to God in His human nature, needing to eat, sleep, capable of pain and so on. He alone is the God-man through whom every human must go for salvation and communion with God (Acts 4:12).

In recalling this event, we listen to God’s word being poured over us during the readings. Our hearts are warmed and softened through the Advent season as we ache for a deepening of relationship with this Child of God in our own heart.

We surrender more and more of self to the love of God calling us out of darkness, selfishness, ego centrality, into benevolent regard and lovingkindness. God the Father gives us His Son yet His Son is also Her Son and she too is extending Her Jesus to the sinful world as a manifestation of her own love for each and every human. His pain will be her pain as only another loving mother can understand.

The role Joseph played is paramount in protecting his Always Virgin Bride and the 'Fetus' in her womb. He loved God with all his heart which he demonstrated by noticing the pregnancy and choosing to be faithful to God in not marrying what seemed like a grave fault so he chose to quietly break off the engagement. Yet, once tested in faith, God conveyed to him in a dream that the child was conceived of God through the fidelity and love of God by the Mother. In other words, covenantal fidelity to God through the following of His law predisposes man and woman for covenantal love between each other for the possibility of procreation. By going to God, we have the opportunity through the Christmas event to make right what may be a separation between us and God and His mother. We bridge this gap in the sacrament of reconciliation and gift a child to God by exposure to His way of life as demonstrated through lives of faith. His Son died for love of us and we die to sin for love of Him and each other in daily family life.

The name Joseph means "He shall add" or "increaser" (Heb.). We understand this by reflecting on the Joseph of Egypt who was saved from being murdered by his brothers through being sold into slavery to one of Pharaoh's leaders and eventually rising to be the right-hand man of the King of Egypt. Remember how he 'stored *wheat*' for 7 years in preparation of the famine to come? He *increased*....the saving life sustenance (*wheat*) which would be used to feed the people. Likewise, St. Joseph brought *increase* to the '*wheat*' of The Word in the lives of Jesus and Mary to feed the world with "the bread of God (Jn. 6:41-51).

Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Heb. House of Bread). He is the bread of life Who meets us in Eucharist at Christmas Mass and every Mass. He is the *true wheat* that exposes all dandelion (Mat.13: 24-30), Whose word as Word is the seed (Lk. 8:11) which every ground (human) is called to *germinate unto fruition* so that the human may glorify His Father (Jn. 15: 8) by bearing much fruit.

That fruit is one of wisdom (Heb. chokmah), understanding (Heb. bin, sakal), knowledge of God's word (Heb. yadah, daath), skillful counseling (Heb. tachbuloth), salvific wisdom (Heb, tushiyah), and personal knowledge of God (Heb, deah) through love that leads to an ever deepening living the life of Christ planted within us. It is depicted in the step-by-step process outlined in the beatitudes (Math. 5:1FF) and in most cases leads to being persecuted, humiliated, shamed, the subject of gossip, lied about, slandered, back-stabbed, and so on as a participation in the redemptive suffering of Christ and because darkness hates light and wants to snuff it out and discredit the living flame (John of the Cross) that draws others to Eternal Life.

In becoming the 'salt of the earth' (Math. 5:13-16) as Jesus says, we live a counter cultural life-style that rubs some the wrong way because their lives are culture-based in acts of darkness. Jesus came to destroy the works of darkness, which He did, and to live on in us continually destroying the work of darkness as witness to Him through our love of God, fidelity to His law...to love God with ones all (Dt.6:4FF) and one's neighbor as oneself (Mat. 22:37-40), the summation of all commandments.

Christmas then is a *memorial* in which the seed of the word made flesh was planted in us through catechesis, has been exercised in fidelity to His law and love of neighbor, and is consummated in Eucharistic love. It is a *memorial* in which we allow the Christ-child within to consume our sin through daily repentance so that He may live more and more through us to the glory of God the Father, ***reconciling the world to Himself*** (2 Cor. 5:18-21). St. Joseph, our Immaculate Mother, and the Christ-child demonstrate as humans how we are to live with God and each other and how every act is one of service and worship to The Living God in the here and now until He comes again.

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