

GUWAHATI NEWSLETTER

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE, AMBARI, GUWAHATI - 781001

Do great things for us, O Lord, for you are mighty, and holy is your name

December 2012

For Private Circulation only

Vol. 16 No. 6

The Shepherd Speaks...



We are in the Christmas week. A flurry of activities accompanies the feast, all of which exudes joy and happiness. We see stars on house tops, in living rooms, and on churches; illuminations and decoration of Christian homes, institutions, shops and streets are visible in many places. People send Christmas cards, exchange gifts; there is the carol singing and the dancing Christmas Papa and many other things. The excitement of Christmas does not look out of place as about one third of the world's seven billion people profess Christian faith and it comes as a holiday for almost all the nations of the world. Besides it precedes the New Year that now almost everyone is aware of. Christmas and celebrate it with varying degrees of fervour and enthusiasm. Christmas deserves such excitement for it is the celebration of God becoming man to live among men, of God becoming a baby and being born of a simple virgin.

told, "Today is born for you in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. You will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger" (Lk 2:11-12). The atmosphere that night was filled with sweet sound of angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will" (Lk 2:14). Later on wise men came from the East to worship this child and offer him gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. They were led to the spot where Jesus was by a special star that appeared in the sky when he was born. The humble circumstances in which he was born though he was God himself, make us love God all the more.

There was a great expectation among men and women of his time about the coming of a Messiah, a saviour who would deliver them from all evil. Prophets and holy men foretold the circumstances in which he would be born. His birth tells us that God really loves us. He did not come exclusively for Christians, he is the saviour of all men. We read in the Bible, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that those who believe in him may not perish but gain eternal life." (Jn 3:16). In Jesus, because he is a man, God knows our situation perfectly and in him God could manifest his love for all men. And Jesus, on behalf of all people, willingly underwent excruciating pain and death in reparation for the sins of all people of all times and made all people worthy of being God's children and inheritors of heaven. His resurrection after death proved beyond doubt that he is God and the master of life and death. Those who believe that Jesus is God and repent of their sins become his brother or sister and will inherit eternal life. In the Bible we read, "This is eternal life that they may know thee the true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3).

Jesus is no more with us as a historical person. But with his resurrection from the dead his presence fills the earth. He seeks a place within human hearts. He says, "Listen, I am standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me" (Rev 3;20).

*Christmas comes every year
with the message of love; it tells
us that God loves me and wants
me to live in intimate union
with him; he wants me to share
my love with my brothers and
sisters around me.*

Editorial..

Christmas Giving

This is a season of loving and giving. God loved human beings and he gave his Son. Mother Mary loved God and she gave herself to be the dwelling place for God's only Son. Mary loved, she gave and gave till the end.

To illustrate the importance of one's presence while, Catherine Doherty, the Founder of Madonna House narrates a story.

Back during the Depression, at Friendship House in Toronto, I had so many people come to me for Christmas cheer, for food, that I had a long list. I went begging all over the place for them, and kindly butchers and grocers donated enough to fulfill the needs of about 400 or 500 people.

Then, two days before Christmas a little mother came to me. She had been sick and her husband had abandoned her. She had six children, and asked me for something to give them to eat.

All I could do was to phone a very rich person, a friend of mine, and explain the situation. She said: "You can forget it. Katie, I'll attend to it." So Christmas came and Christmas went, and I was wondering what this lady had given the family.

About a week later, the mother dropped in and said to me: "It was wonderful. We had turkey and celery and sweet potatoes and a big cake. You should have seen it. It wasn't a basket; it was four baskets! And there were toys for all the children, and candies. Oh, we never had a Christmas like that!"

Then she stopped, and tears came to her eyes. "You know, there is one sadness in my heart," she said. "A handsome chauffeur with a beautiful car brought the gifts. But the lady who sent the baskets wasn't there, and so I couldn't thank her."

Yes, the rich lady sent the family all the things she could think of; but she didn't send herself. And that made all the difference!

May this special season enable you to be giver of God's love.

Parish Day Celebrated

Tillappara: St Alphonsa's parish celebrated the Parish Day on 23 November. Most Rev. John Moolachira concelebrated the Day's Eucharist with 12 Priests.



In his homily he exhorted the faithful "to remain firm like St Alphonsa in their Christian faith during moments of difficulties."

On this auspicious occasion 43 children received first communion.

As a preparation for the parish day there were two retreats for men and women separately. Fr Joy from the Diocese of Tura who guided the retreat for men,

helped them understand the role they need to play in order to build a good Christian family. The three-day retreat was attended by 70 men.

Fr Francis from Tikrikilla Parish guided the retreat for 80 women, members of Marian Sodality. He spoke to them about their role in building sturdy Christian families where they can also foster vocations to Priesthood and Religious life.

Two sisters from Tikrikilla parish prepared the children for first holy communion.



The parishioners were happy with the Parish Day Celebrations which was an occasion for them to renew and strengthen their faith. During the cultural programme that followed the Parish day Eucharist, the parishioners expressed their gratitude to Fr Arockiasamy, the parish Priest and Pallottine Sisters.

Children's Day Celebrated

Sonapur: St Patrick School at Sonapur celebrated the Children's Day on Nov. 14.



The teachers of the School offered the children a treat through a cultural programme of dances and songs.

In his message to the children, Fr Joseph Kuttinal the Principal of the School reminded the students "Today's children are tomorrow's leaders." He encouraged them "to grow in discipline, character, moral values which can help them fight corruption in society."

SSLC Students Felicitated

Sonapur: The students of Class IX, St Patrick School, accorded a fitting farewell to their seniors as they go ahead to write their SSLC exams and move out of School.

In his message to them Fr Crosper, Parish Priest said, "Now you are leaving the school after 12 years and you are going out into the world beset with various problems. We have instructed you in values and now is the time to practice them as no one will be after you. Continue to sharpen your mind, refine and mature your emotions and exercise your will power to do, to dare and care. Develop your own personal individuality, and become a contributing member to your family, society, school that you 'built you up'.

Fr Croser reminded them to have an aim in life and to work towards the achievement of that goal.

The teachers also exhorted the students “to remember their Alma Mater and live up to the values that they have learned from the school”.

Fr Joseph Kuttinal

Medical Camp

Panbazar: Three medical camps were held in November in St Joseph’s Co-cathedral parish including one Ayurveda camp by Kerala-based Shantigiri Ayurveda Clinic.

It was a good opportunity for many people specially those who cannot afford a general medical check up in hospitals due to financial difficulties.

The camp was organized under the leadership of Fr Solomon, the Parish priest and the Parish Council.

Prison Ministry

Guwahati: Prison Ministry of India Volunteers (PMI) in the Archdiocese of Guwahati organized a cultural day for the inmates of the Guwahati Centre Jail on 24



November. The day coincided with the visit of the national Co-ordinator and Founder Fr Varghese Kodiyan. The Volunteers organised six



competitions for the Men and four competitions for the women.

Archbishop John Moolachira the chief guest on the occasion exhorted the inmates “to consider themselves as family members.” “It is a home away from home. Now you are members of one family,” he told them.

Archbishop John distributed the prizes to the winners.

Sr Miriam led the entire assembly into prayer and Sr Sarah FMA enriched the gathering with an Assamese bhajan, which created a prayerful atmosphere.

The PMI Volunteers visits the central Jail four times a month organizing prayer, games and counselling sessions for the inmates. The inmates are also given lessons in handicrafts.



The PMI also organised pre-Christmas get-together for the inmates on 19 December. On this occasion the devotional songs and dances giving the message of Christamas.

Saleians form the third Province in North East India

Guwahati: Blessed with a steady increase of vocations and expansion the Salesian Province of Guwahati is bifurcated and formed the new Salesian Province of Silchar, with Silchar as the province headquarters.

The new province of Silchar will consist of the Archdiocese of Shillong, and the dioceses of Nongstoin, Jowai, Agartala and Aizawl as well as Dima Hasao district of the diocese of Diphu. The patron of the new Salesian province is **Bl. John Paul II**, in memory of the Holy Father who visited Shillong in 1986.

The Guwahati province which was formed in 1959 will consist of the Archdiocese of Guwahati, and the dioceses of Tura, Bongaigaon, Tezpur and Diphu.

Bifurcating the Province of Guwahati, Province of Dimapur was formed in 1981.

According to Fr Joseph Almeida sdb, the Salesian Provincial of Guwahati “This is a momentous step in the growth of the Church in the region as well as of the Salesian Congregation which has contributed might and main to the growth and development of Northeast India under the guidance of Our Lady.”

The first twelve Salesian Missionaries from Italy arrived in Guwahati in 1922. The missionaries spent themselves in the education of the local

people, and sharing with them the message of Christ which endeared them and their successors to the natives to this day.

Jerome Day Celebrated

Sonaighuli: The students of Jerome institute staged a play on the life of Maximillion Kolbe as a part of seminary day celebrations.

Each of the actors played their part so well, that it was a very touching performance.

In his address to the students Archbishop Thomas spoke to them about St Jerome the patron Saint of the Seminary. “Jerome was very hard working. Enamoured by Christ he studies Bible in the cave in Bethlehem.”

He exhorted the young people to work hard and said, “Whenever you work hard you are becoming better Persons. You will be able to do more things in future When we perform externally we benefit internally too.

In his message Archbishop John invited the young seminarians to “fill their hearts with all that is holy.” If we are able to do it we can influence people, he said.

The evening was made memorable by various cultural presentations by the students of brothers of Congregation of St Theresa and MSMHC candidates.

Joint Peace Team (Northeast) Moves to Manipur

Manipur: A 121-day economic blockade had led Manipur to a most unenviable situation. The Kukis were demanding the creation of Sadar Hills District and the Nagas were feeling that its creation would compromise their interests. Thus, a land of rich cultural heritage, extremely talented people and breathtaking beauty was caught in a state of helplessness. Prices of essential goods had shot up leaving the poor in distressing conditions. With over 18 insurgency groups operating in the Imphal valley, side by side with heavy deployment of army, paramilitary and police forces, there is hardly sufficient space left for civil

society. What are heard day after day are news about extortion, kidnapping, massacres, *bandhs*, economic blockades, food scarcity, extremely high prices, 20-hour load-shedding, and ethnic clashes. Meantime elections are due and major decisions are ahead.

As the economic blockade continued, Central and State Governments found no way of bringing the contesting groups to a dialogue and end that form of protest. The sufferings of the people in Imphal valley knew no bounds. It was at this time that the ecumenical “Joint Peace Mission Team” (JPMT) under the leadership of Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil decided to offer their help to the communities.



This Church-supported Peace Team had hesitated to intervene in this matter for a long time, since the dispute between the two communities was linked with political issues. However, when other agencies had failed in making a headway and the hardship upon civil society was beyond endurance, a compassionate intervention became necessary.

On November 5th the Joint Peace Team held an emergency meeting at the Baptist Mission at Guwahati under the guidance of Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil. They decided to send an ‘interim delegation’ to Imphal to plead with the leaders of the communities concerned (Nagas and Kukis) not to aggravate the situation. The blockade was lifted a few days after this intervention. The JPMT does not claim that this was done through its intervention, but are happy that they could be helpful at a moment of anxiety. The suspension of the blockade meant to be temporary. A more serious intervention was called for.

On December 18th, 6-members representing the Joint Peace Mission Team and all the Churches of Northeast India made their way from Guwahati to Imphal. In spite of the fact that the dates chosen were too close to Christmas and local *bandhs* prevented several leaders from reaching Imphal, the peace meeting held on December 19th at the Tribal Research Centre was attended by over 50 prominent leaders of both communities.

Along with Archbishop Menamparampil there were Rev. Lama, General Secretary of the Council of Baptist Churches, Mr. A.K. Goldsmith, Former President CBCNEI, Mr. Allen Brooks, Member, Assam State Commission for Minorities, Fr. Varghese, Director, North East Diocesan Social Forum and Mr. N. Meru, Regional Coordinator, Churches Auxiliary for Social Action. The discussions were amicable in spite of the prevailing tense situation. Archbishop Dominic Lumon of Imphal also was present. Concluding the meeting the Joint Peace Mission Team made an appeal to all persons concerned to adopt a path of peace in handling their various difference. To the best of information available, the appeal has been well received by the two parties concerned. During the meeting it was also proposed that a 2-day study seminar could be organized after a period of time to reflect on the overall situation in Manipur from different angles in order explore ways of handling manifold problems of the state in an intelligent and peaceful manner. It would search for ways of making a Christian contribution to the solution of the many problems of the state. The proposal was enthusiastically accepted.

When asked to comment on the issue Archbishop Menamparampil said, “What we have done is small, but it was timely. And so it had a beneficial influence. A Kuki meeting that took place next day promised to honour our appeal. I am sure the Naga response will be similar. After all, Christmas is near, and we are all longing for peace.”

Inter-religious Meet

Joypur: The interfaith and Ecumenical Commission for North East region organized a consultation on the theme: Religion for all. About 52 people of various religious faiths participated in the programme at Social Forum on 15 & 16 November.



The objective of the consultation was to enable each diocese to build up an Interfaith and Ecumenical Team that could promote peace and harmony in one's own respective areas.

Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil sdb, the Regional Chairman of the Commission in his keynote address said, "We all belong each other. We like to hear message of peace, forgiveness and co-belonging." He exhorted the participants "to dialogue with those who oppose us too and to search for the good in the other because there is some good in everyone". According to him this will help to remove the prejudices if

any. "bring to reality the teachings we learn from our own faith in times of trouble," he added.



Regional Secretary Fr Joy Pallikkunnel in his welcome address explained the objective of the this meeting. "Building as well as promoting understanding among diverse groups has become a necessity in the world," he said. "Religion today must be a transforming power for the good of all. No religion needs to assert itself as exclusive or sole authority," he added.

Fr Tom Mangattuthazhe from Diphu Diocese said, "For people to co-exist peacefully, there is need for mutual

respect, justice, tolerance, openness and constant interaction.

According to him religious leaders have a role in promoting co-existence and can take a leading role in promoting peaceful co-existence."

As a follow up of the meeting, an Executive Body was formed, Bro Jesudass Ssp as the Secretary to set up a Peace Channel branch in Guwahati. The All Assam Peace Channel was inaugurated on 18 November at SSp Centre, on 9th Mile.

Bro Jesudass SSp



North East Mission Congress, 2011

Shillong: The Northeast Mission Congress was held in Shillong from Nov. 12-14.

Cardinal Telesphore Toppo, Archbishop of Ranchi, in his address told the participants pointing out the importance of the Mission Congress, "The future of the church to some extent depends on the tribals and those who are working among them in Northeast and Central India. Be authentic Catholics. Be what you are wherever you are. That is the way to evangelize. Jesus must be able to live in us. We must be able to say



after the Mission Congress, with St Paul, 'It is not I who live now but Christ who lives in me.' Non-Christian brethren ought to see Jesus in us."

Referring to the Educational Institutions as places of evangelization he said, " Educational Institutions must be the backbone of the Church Through educational institutions the church can instruct and enlighten about the evils of corruption that is plaguing the country. The church can play a vital role as it

has invested manpower and resources in education."

Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil sdb, the main speaker of the Congress, exhorted the participants "to have a great zeal in our missionary tasks and to be open to welcome all people."

He suggested to preserve "the values learned from one own family, culture and tribes. When we compromise on values we are committing suicide. Values are the soul of cultures. Soul of the culture is what is good and noble. It helps one to do something better. We also learn to respect each other."

"May we be carriers of peace in this time of corruption and violence. May our love for Jesus through our relationship evangelize others. "



"Our inner loyalty will give us the strength to proclaim the Gospel," he said and added, "Know what are the right things to do in the right context in our missionary tasks. Get into the mental

world of people and love them for what they are. It is important to establish a relationship for the success of evangelization." He cautioned, "However do it with prudence."



According to Archbishop Thomas, "Just as you proclaim the Gospel from the house tops in some places, you need to whisper the Gospel in some other places. Whispering is very important in some places of Asia. Mysteries have to be whispered, intimately, regally, like Jesus in the upper chamber. When you whisper it penetrates. Mystical things have to be shared not proclaimed."

The aim of the Mission Congress held from 10-13 November was to enthuse the Catholic laity in a new way of evangelization.

Over 1500 delegates from 15 dioceses of Northeast took part in the three-day Congress.

The Mission Congress concluded with the Eucharistic procession on 13 November.

The Congress began on Thursday at the Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians, Laitumkhrah. The participants professionals from various fields such as Academicians, Policy makers (Civil servants, Politicians) Business men and Social workers, Health workers (doctors, nurses, para-medics), Professionals (Engineers, Lawyers, administrators), Media personnel (Journalists, writers, Musicians, Painters).

A Teacher, Michael Toppo, 32, a delegate of the Mission Congress said, “ The mission Congress is very important for us . Before we had the impression that mission work was entrusted to the priests and religious. Now we know we are also equally missionaries. We are also chosen and given the responsibility to proclaim. We have to take care of instilling values in our family life and in students. If not our life will be shallow. In the absence of values there will be corruption. We have received Christian faith.”



For Happy M D Blah and Mirth Blah (social workers) “ The Mission had been educative, enthusing us to go forward with all our humanness to proclaim his kingdom, for the greater glory of God and his creation.”



“I am very happy to realize that we the health workers can also proclaim Christ through our health ministry,” said Melinda Marbaniang, a nurse.

“The mission Congress has given us an insight as how to go about with our life, work and dealing with patients. We thought only Bishops, priest and nuns could proclaim the Word of God. Now we know that even with health work we can convey the message of the Gospel to others; we can support the patients spiritually, extending a healing touch with our presence. Pray before giving medicine, operation... By the way we live we can give good example to others,”

she added.

Augustine Sunn IPS, (D I G of Police, Meghlalaya) said, “ This was a platform where we are trying to bring forth our thoughts as how to improve our Catholic life, and instill moral values in our public life and society. Here we also come to know what we need from the church and what we can give to the church. It was an opportunity to know one another in the same profession in the north east, in our spiritual life and in our daily life.”

Anima Ekka a teacher was glad, “It was an occasion to learn how to evangelize anywhere in our own small way. We also learn how to maintain Christian principles, how to approach people and convey the message to them, interacting with love, coming close to them, through relationships.

Special Message

“We take every thought captive
and make it obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5)

Experiencing the Power of God Ben Clausen PhD.

Lift up your eyes on high,
And see who has created these things,
Who brings out their host by number;
He calls them all by name,
By the greatness of his might
And the strength of His power;
Not one is missing.

(Is. 40:26)

Indeed, lift up your eyes with Isaiah, and see the great wonders on high. Look at the moon. It is about 240,000 miles away. If you take a passenger jet that travels at the speed of 600 miles per hour, it will take some 17 days to get to the moon. Forty years ago, *Apollo* pioneers made it to the moon in less than four days. That's still a long way, and yet light takes only a little more than a second to cover that distance at 186,000 miles per second. Who placed the moon just right in space that it may be a light in the night for simple humans such as we are?

And where is the sun? Light from the sun takes only eight minutes to reach the earth. That means the sun is roughly 93 million miles away from the earth; a little nearer and we would scorch; a little farther and we would freeze. Just the right distance away, and who was responsible for this ruler of the day?

Think of the solar system. The farthest any man-made satellite has traveled is out to the edge of the system, several billion miles away. In 1977, scientists launched the *Voyager 2*

Spacecraft to explore outer space. Traveling at a speed of some 42,000 miles per hour, 12 years later *Voyager 2* took a peek at Neptune. The spacecraft was so far away from earth that it took four hours for a radio signal (traveling at the speed of light) to reach the earth. And Neptune and planet Earth are neighbours within the same solar system.

Why stop at the solar system? Look at a clear, velvety night sky, and you see millions of stars, twinkling like lanterns. Our nearest star (Alpha Centauri) is 10,000 times farther away than Neptune, or about 25 trillion miles. For these kinds of distances, it is easier to just to travel that far, which in this case, totals about four years. For any of the stars we can see with the unaided eye, light has been traveling for up to several hundred years.

But these stars are only part of the Milky Way galaxy that extends out far enough that it takes light 100,000 years to reach us from stars on its edge.

Beyond our own Milky Way galaxy are myriads of other galaxies. The most distant object visible to the unaided eye is one of these galaxies, called Andromeda, which is more than two million light-years away. However, the Hubble Space Telescope currently looks at objects that are more than 1,000 times farther away than even the Andromeda Galaxy. That is a septillion miles away, and this is a baffling figure. One with 24 zeros after it.

No wonder Isaiah was lost for words, and cried out in awe and wonder: "See who has created these things." And the psalmist was driven more to penitence and praise: "The heavens declare the glory of God; / And the firmament shows His handiwork./ Day unto day utters speech," And night unto night reveals knowledge" (Ps. 19:1,2).

From the grandest to the minutest

If the grandest in the universe leaves us speechless, what about the minutest of which God made? He is not only the Lord who created the galaxies, infinite stars, distant planets, towering mountains, and vast oceans that continue to baffle us. He is also the Lord who controls, reigns, and rules over the minutest details of our universe. “The very hairs of your head are all numbered,” said Jesus (Matt. 10:30). Now, the human hair is not very thick, but even so, across its thickness 100 human cells can be lined up side by side. Each cell can easily accommodate hundreds of viruses, and each virus can stack up thousands of atoms. Even the atom is much larger than the protons inside it. If the protons inside an atom were scaled to the size of a basketball, the size of the atom would be about the size of Delhi, home of 12 million people.

That is our challenge. God’s power in nature is there for us to see. But more importantly, we need to experience God’s power in the Gospel, the power that changes our own lives, and makes us His children. That we have the power to argue for a particular viewpoint, whether in science or theology, is not so crucial, but we must recognize the importance of experiencing the power of changed lives so we can reach out and touch others. Not a form of godliness, but the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Power of God’s Kingdom and Ministry

J.P. Moreland, PhD

In his book *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Philip Jenkins, a distinguished professor of history at Penn State, notes that the most significant changes in the world during the last portion of the twentieth century were not secular trends like fascism, communism, feminism, or environmentalism. According to Jenkins, “It is precisely religious changes that are the most significant, and even the most revolutionary, in the contemporary world.... We are currently living through one of the transforming movements in the history of religion worldwide.” According to Jenkins, the church is exploding at unprecedented rates in the so-called Third World.

In the last 50 years or so, and especially since 1980, revivals are breaking out all over; one of the best-kept secrets of the era is the explosion of the kingdom of God and a harvest of converts and disciples greater than anything the world has ever seen. In fact, the single most explosive movement of any kind—political, military,— whatever is the spread of the gospel and the advance of the kingdom.

Consider the following; some estimate that in 1970, there were around 71 million born-again Christians with a vision to reach out to the entire world for Christ. By the year 2000, there were 707 million, roughly 11 percent of the earth’s population. Up until 1960, Western evangelicals outnumbered non-western evangelicals two-to one, but by 2000, non Westerners (mostly Latinos, Blacks and Asians) led Westerners four-to-one by 2010. Today, more missionaries are sent from non-western nations than from Western nations. At a church planting congress in 1998, representatives from Latin American countries set a staggering goal of planting 500,000 new churches by 2010, and it appears that the target will be reached. In fact, five nations have already reached their target goals and have set new ones.

Kingdom power and the ministry of Jesus

At the core of this explosion has been an outbreak of “signs and wonders” as expressions of the power of the kingdom of God. With rare exceptions, the Western church has lagged behind in seeing such power compared to the church in the Third World.

We are to do “greater works” than He did; that is, we have to continue Jesus’ ministry with power in dependence on the Spirit. This is not a charismatic or noncharismatic issue but a kingdom and ministry-of-Jesus issue.

Jesus and the Gospel of Justification

Even a cursory reading of the Gospels reveals that Jesus understood that His mission required Him to engage in the war of ideas. Thus, while He was much more than this, at His core, Jesus was a teacher and a Prophet. To be sure, He was deeply involved in action: healing, delivering, performing other sorts of miracles, and confronting various forms of evil and injustice. But even here, His actions were done to reveal, reinforce, reflect and validate His teachings. So when Jesus saw thousands of needy people, His compassion moved Him (among other things) to *teach* (Mark 6:34). Matthew's statement is typical of the Gospel writers' summaries of Jesus' activities and intentions: He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities (Matt 11:1).