

Contemplating CHRIST AT CHRISTMAS



DISHAN JOSEPH

December is a month loaded with yuletide moments and blissful memories of Christmas celebrations. My cherished memories are our family reunions which were enhanced by the spicy pork curry and roast beef, along with the other traditional food items. I miss the “vintage” sweets such as coconut rock and kisses.

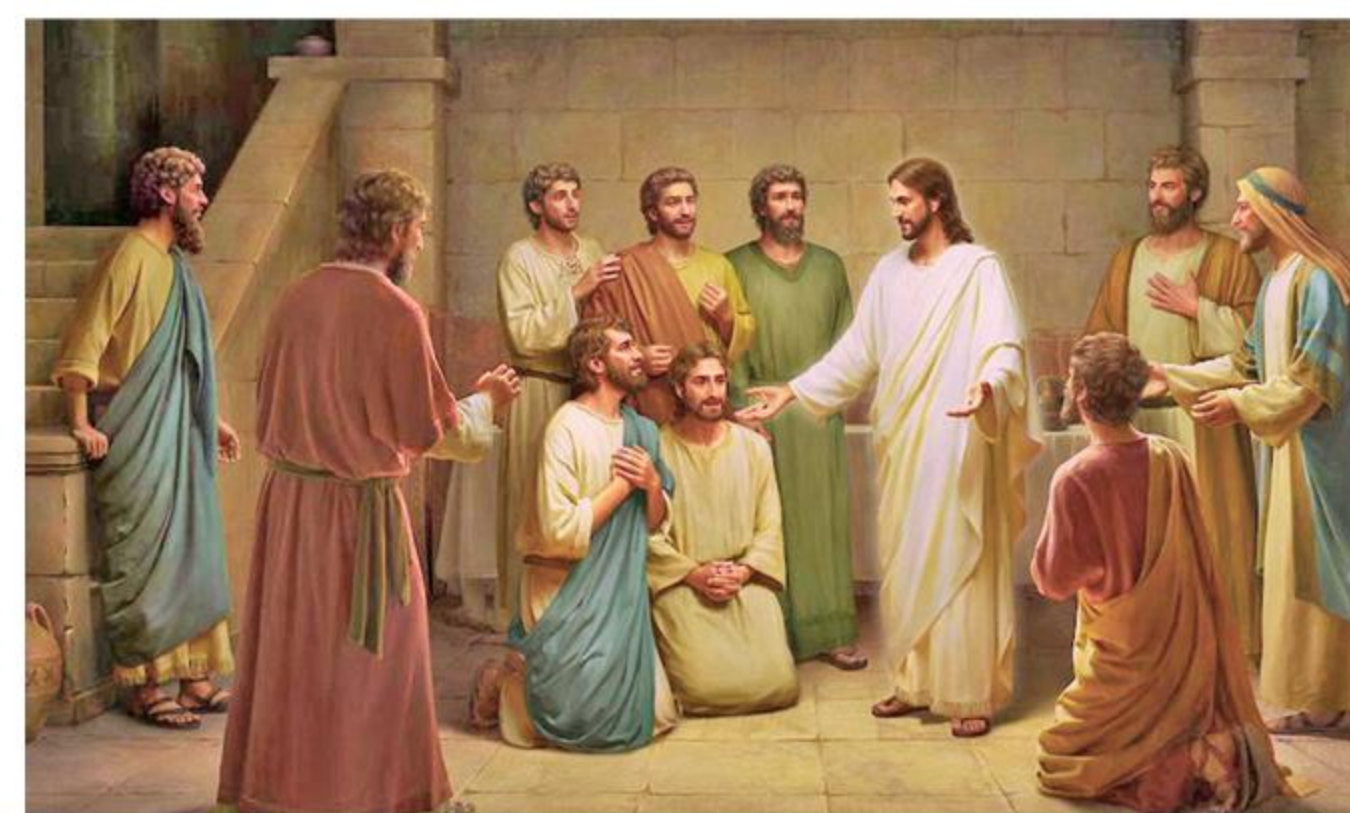
Since childhood, I have been deeply inquisitive about the identity of the three Wise men and their symbolic gifts. Perhaps this intrigue was stirred in my mind due to the other two phrases used to describe these three visitors - namely Magi and Kings. I think as kids we readily understood and identified the celestial angels and the humble shepherds. But who were these Magi from the Orient? Were they really from the Asian region?

During my adult life, I watched many documentaries on the Discovery Channel and National Geographic Channel and was stunned about how far this trio journeyed with their “logistics team” and how they navigated the ancient paths, which finally led them to the child Jesus. I am certain Joseph and Mary would have also been somewhat puzzled at their arrival and the uncommon gifts given to the gentle baby. We all know the background of the birth of Jesus and the impending threat defiantly presented by a power greedy and insecure Herod, who felt threatened by an infant.

Every year the Christian

church presents beautifully choreographed scenes of the nativity. But how often do we follow the example of the Wisemen in their quest to meet Jesus? The Bible has many parables and references to being wise and the Proverbs relentlessly encourage us to pursue wisdom, emphasizing its bountiful rewards of which one is a long and healthy life. Proverbs Chapter 4 is dedicated to this cause. Verse 5 reminds us “Get wisdom, get understanding”.

In the past decade, there has been what I like to call “an academic explosion” in Sri Lanka - because one can study so many degrees at so many foreign-affiliated universities and colleges. This is good (and often expensive). If we look back at Verse 5 it says: “Get wisdom - get understanding”. The writer makes a clear distinction that wisdom and understanding are two different realms. Today people proudly display their academic achievements - BSc, MSc, MBA and PhD. This is awesome and indeed a brilliant achievement involving years of hard



research. However, we all have encountered such ‘qualified’ people who are rude and uncaring, and remain “socially challenged” in dealing with other decent human beings. They lack understanding.

Once again Proverbs Chapter 4 Verse 7 says: “Wisdom is supreme, therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding”. We can see that though wisdom is considered supreme, the greater focus is to obtain understanding at all costs. Two Bible stories come to my mind. One of them was prudent Nicodemus, the Pharisee who met Jesus in the secrecy of nighttime. Nicodemus asked whether he could enter his mother’s womb to be born again. The other is the rich young man (who must have been academically supreme in keeping with his status) who put his trust in his wealth and couldn’t understand the simple instruction given to him. In today’s digitally-dominated world, these men would have been called “dumbo” or “bozo”. Be that as it may, we find that understanding is the practical application of knowledge. The Greek word for wisdom (to be wise) is *Sophia* which refers to expertise in any domain of knowledge. I have met some beautiful women who had this name, but less of the desired characteristic. Interestingly the Greek word *Phronesis* refers to practical wisdom and prudence. Practical wisdom is the understanding which the writer of Proverbs kindly demands us to have.

You might wonder why I have elaborated on these two words, during Christmas. A few readers may have preferred if I had shared the recipe for that succulent pork curry. On a serious note, for the “real” follower of Jesus, Christmas is not an annual feel-good festival augmented



The message of hope and permanent salvation, through the divine birth, crucifixion and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, should give us hope especially within this “new normal” era amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

by the appearance of Santa Claus. The message of hope and permanent salvation, through the divine birth, crucifixion and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, should give us hope especially within this “new normal” era amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. So we have hopefully understood that we must seek Jesus, in order to live an effective and beautiful life. I must warn you that this wholesome life with Christ induced values is totally different, from others’ aspirations of materialistic prosperity which the Bible does not promote. Jesus was born in a manger to imply humility and simplicity.

The word ‘seek’ is a continuous happening daily action. In order to live a practical Christian life that effortlessly yields love, kindness, forgiveness, friendship and care, we must follow and ‘seek’ the Risen Saviour in his present form. There are some Christians who whole-heartedly try to seek our Lord Jesus in his ‘infant’ state or in the sorrowful ‘crucified’ state. We must move beyond Calvary and perhaps even Israel. Some are ‘seeking’ Jesus inside the Holy Land tours and feel divinely touched after purchasing a bottle of Israeli-made olive oil. Blessed readers, we can find liberation in our inner spirit only when we sincerely ‘seek’ Jesus in his resurrected state where he rules the universe as the King

of Kings. Christmas is not restricted to December in a spiritual sense but finds its greater meaning when seen in the resurrection of Jesus. In his resurrection, Jesus Christ completed the cycle of his birth in Bethlehem. His resurrection is the ultimate purpose of his divine birth.

You may have completed your Christmas shopping by now. Did you get the dazzling lights for your Christmas tree? Jesus is introduced to us in the Bible as the Light of the World. Following the light of Jesus and seeking him is a challenge. I recall the words of the late Shelly Poobalan (Youth for Christ) who told me once that sin is “missing the mark”. I have missed the mark many times in life’s journey. Matthew 13 Verse 15 implies that delayed obedience is actually disobedience.

A ship of any size needs the lighthouse irrespective of all modern naval advances in navigation and maritime radar. I like to reintroduce Jesus today as the Resurrected Radiant Redeemer. We are about to enter 2022. The long COVID pandemic has impacted our lives in many ways, creating some doubts. Some Christians are consulting their horoscopes and birth times. Remember, whatever job you do, Jesus will guide you and provide for you in this coming New Year. Find your wisdom and understanding in him, by His grace. You must try to seek him within and His will under the guidance of the omnipresent Holy Spirit. Let your neighbours, colleagues and friends see an empowered Christian in you. I wish you a blessed Christmas and conclude with a question. The Magi followed the star faithfully and reached their destination. Are you seeking Jesus for the right reasons?