



Daily News

We wish our readers a Peaceful and Merry Christmas

...rekindle the passions of town & country folk

# Hope rekindled for a better world

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**Christmas** this time around too is dogged by COVID-19, the pandemic continuing to take a heavy toll on lives worldwide, resulting in drastic scaling down of celebratory events needless to say dampening the Yuletide cheer. One can therefore only pray and not lose hope- the same kindled hope that the infant Jesus sprung in the hearts of all mankind of de-emption from death and opening the doors for eternal life. Be that as it may for some though, despite the gloom, Christmas cannot be separated from the age-old merriment.

No doubt the spirit of Christmas is all-pervasive and the season of Yuletide is looked forward to with eager anticipation, even during the darkest spells of history in the Christian world. After all, this is not the first time that a plague has overtaken this world, from leprosy outbreaks in Biblical times to the Black Death in the Middle Ages. Yet Man has overcome these obstacles to gain victory in the end.

Here in Sri Lanka, too COVID-19 notwithstanding Christian homes are agog with preparations for Christmas. The traditional cakes are still very much part and parcel of the main fare never mind the gas shortages and other obstacles. Christmas, as always, is a hive of activity in many homes. Shopping is an integral part of the Christmas agenda though a damper is thrown this time around with health restrictions imposed to combat the raging pandemic. Although crowds are less this year due to the health guidelines seasonal perennials continue to blare forth from shops which as usual are gaily decorated with Christmas trappings.

### CHRISTMAS HAMPERS

Rubicund cheeked Santa Clauses usually a permanent fixture in front of Supermarkets will be conspicuous by their absence or rarely seen, in another bid to avoid crowd gatherings but the shop windows will not be short pamphlets or brochures advertising the latest brands. Special Christmas hampers are also still laid out at supermarkets and luxury stores though this time around with the prices the way they are will be limited only to a select band of customers. Present-day Christmas celebrations have changed over the years in tempo and form. Christmas shopping in the past was a leisurely affair, unlike today's mad scramble. Though salaries were small compared to the present day there was always plenty in reserve for Christmas. The lavish bonuses dished out by many mercantile firms helped fuel the Christmas cheer.

Christmas was also a much looked forward to event in the now almost extinct Burgher community which dominated many pockets in the Colombo city areas such as Hulftsdorp, Princess Gate Grandpass and Kotahena. For them, Christmas was all about merriment and revelry with no expenses spared. The Bachchanial roister that began days before the great event will progress well into the New Year.

In the good old days, the preceding weeks were devoted to stocking up where the stores were conveyed in the then ubiquitous rickshaws. Central to the run-up to Christmas was the preparation of the Christmas cake for which the assorted ingredients were preserved in jars months ahead. Carols were another feature sung with gusto to perfect harmonising by members of the family and extended family in all Burgher homes.

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In the weeks preceding Christmas, it was also common to see carol singers parading the streets in groups donned in fancy attire visiting every home collecting in the process a substantial purse invariably spent on binges. All this culminated in the midnight mass where the church overflows with the pious and the 'once a year' churchgoers.

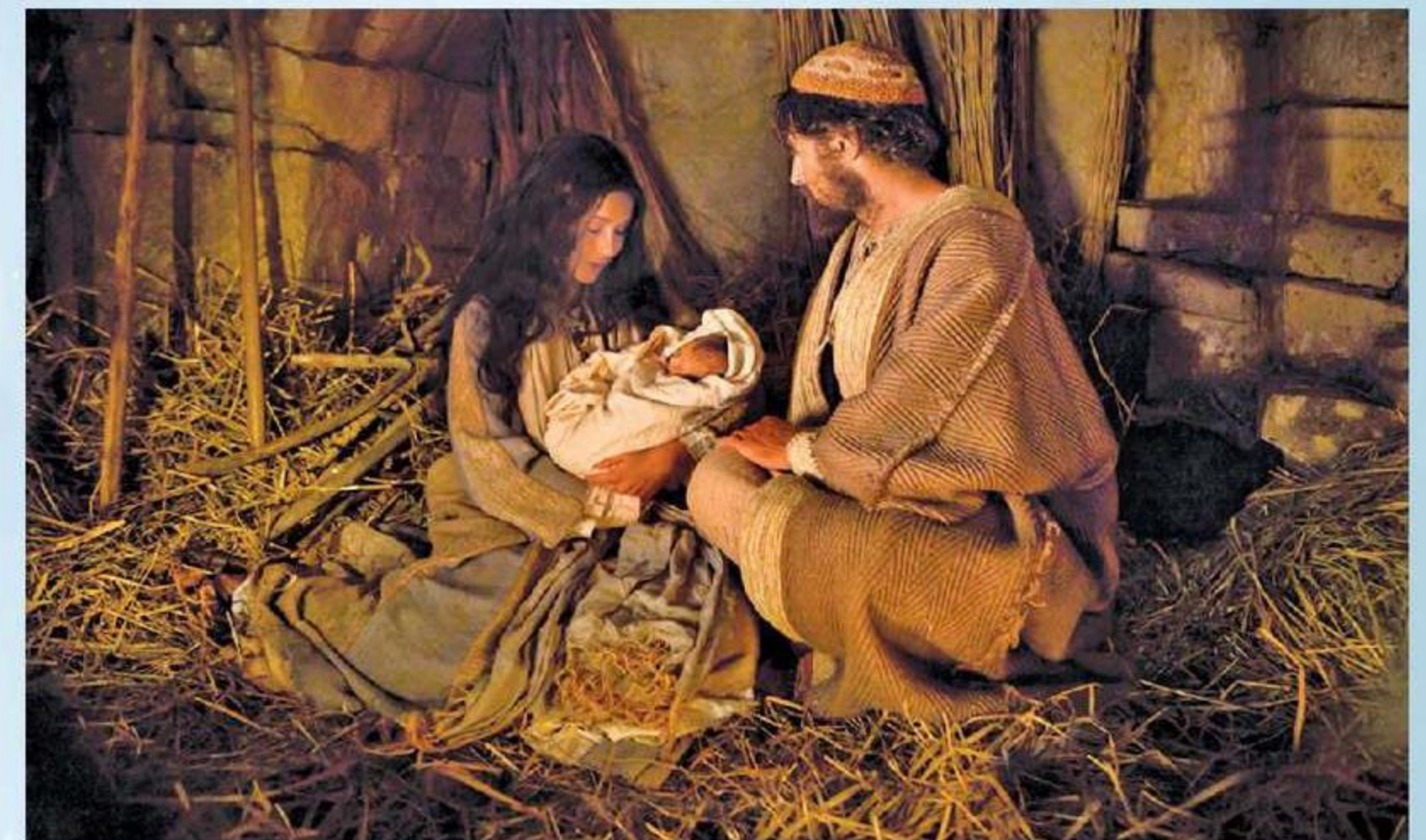
### ETHNIC BOUNDARIES

It goes without saying that Christmas is a universal festival celebrated across different faiths, cultures and ethnic boundaries. No matter what gloom has descended the Christmas spirit cannot be dampened. This is why even amidst the worst economic depressions to hit the Western world some years ago Christmas was celebrated without let or hindrance.

But is Christmas that marks the birth of Christ, the saviour of mankind observed in the way it should? Is this great event heralding peace, joy and salvation to the world being abused and distorted? Sadly amid the babel and humdrum surrounding the Christmas festivities, the underlining message denoting the true meaning of the event is lost. Christmas today has been associated with unbridled commercialism and the cacophony of the marketplace.

Christmas has today become a commodity in the hands of multinational behemoths to rake in shekels. Greed has overtaken the true message and meaning of Christmas which is sacrificed on the altar of mammon.

The contrast with the humble birth of the Christ Child in a manger surrounded by poor shepherds cannot be more glaring. Even the grandeur in which the Christmas mass is celebrated is at variance with the circumstances of the



birth of Christ. Symbols such as the Christmas tree, the crib are only tokens for unrestrained jollity. Sadly even the Church today has failed to get across the true message of Christmas to its flock.

As a result, the spirit of giving, sharing and caring for the poor which is the essence of Christmas is subsumed in the glitter of the festivities and merriment. This sharing and caring attitude are even more important at a time we are facing a pestilence. More importantly this time around with the pandemic driven economic crisis causing job losses and poverty there is no better time than now for the haves to generously loosen their purse strings in reaching out to the poor in the true spirit of Christmas.

### NATIVITY SCENES

More importantly, the time has come to lay more emphasis on the spiritual side of Christmas that is being all but ignored Christmas amidst the revelry. The level of commercialization of Christmas can be seen by the giant structures of the Nativity scenes adorning the frontages of supermarkets and shopping malls, the epitomes of luxury, ostentation and profiteering- a far cry from that scene over 2000 years ago where the Savior was born in a manger surrounded by humble shepherds.

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Hence it is vital for all Christians to hearken to the spirit of the message delivered by the birth of the Redeemer and make Christmas a meaningful and spiritually fulfilling one. True, celebrations are in order for the great gift of God in sending his Son to this world to cleanse and purge all souls of the stain of sin. But the underlying message of Christmas should not be forgotten. Those who splurge on Christmas goodies should spare a thought for the orphans, the COVID sufferers, the deprived and those in the numerous homes for the elders, the prisoners, the terminally ill and those on the verge of death, refugees fleeing oppression. Christ moved among the poor and the deprived and expects His followers to traverse in His footsteps.

Buried in all the joy and gaiety is the true meaning of Christmas with Christians tending to overlook the message of the birth of the Redeemer two millennia ago in a cold stable surrounded by cattle and sheep. Instead, the accent is on the outer trappings.

The underlying message of Christmas should be dinned into the faithful with more emphasis and vigour so that they will be enriched and inspired by the universal message of that far away from the first Christmas.

