

A New Birth taking place in each of us



My love for reading books brought me recently across yet another spiritual book titled, “Truly our sister”, by Elizabeth Johnson C.S.J.

In this book Ms Johnson focuses on the life of Mary, a model for all women but one particularly for us religious. She bases large part of her book on the way Luke portrays Mary and describes how he combines two conventions of Biblical narratives i.e. the birth announcement and the commissioning of the Prophet. These two kinds of narratives follow the same structure.

The scripture, particularly the OT, has many examples and is used at significant junctures in Israel’s history of salvation to announce the birth of a significant child and to describe the call of persons into collaboration with God’s designs.

The gospel of Christmas morning presents a familiar example in the story of angels appearing to the shepherds, which is followed by fear, announcement and reassurance. The other very telling example of call and commission to a prophet is the story of Moses while he is shepherding the flock. 1) The angel appears to him in a burning bush, (2) Moses takes off his shoes, hides his face in fear, (3) then comes the message of God, (4) followed by Moses’ objection, “Who am I? Am too slow of speech” and finally, (5) God’s assurance with the incredible words, “I will be with you”.

Luke (2:1-20) similarly projects the announcement of Jesus’s birth to the call of Mary as a woman commissioned by God. Mary’s ‘yes’ to this divine initiative sets her life off on an adventure into the unknown future. The divine presence will be with her through good times and bad and ultimately the community (that extends all the way to us till today) would remember her with gratitude because of the birth of the Saviour.

Despite encountering various difficulties Mary finally gives birth. Imagine leaving the security of their home in that physical state of Mary, when she needed it the most. It is nothing short of being uprooted. Far from home these expectant parents are found in terrible circumstances with no room for them in the inn. Imagine their state of body and mind at not finding an urgently needed comfortable place. Dependent totally on the generosity of a simple

ding and all that goes with it. In this totally unfamiliar, uncomfortable and most likely unhygienic conditions Mary brings forth a new life into the world.

Fast forward from then to today. What do we find when we look around? Mary, Joseph and their new born bundle of Joy in a make-shift and temporary lodging! Were they not in the same situation as the many homeless in our cities, towns and villages, desperately looking for place to lay their heads? People who lack adequate shelter, the refugee crisis, the impact of demonetisation on the poor in our country or as the marginalized persons pushed to the edge are all familiar sights, if we keep our eyes open to the poor. Mary had brought her child into the world in the manner of enormously disadvantaged people without the security of a home. She, ‘Truly Our Sister’ is a perfect model for us in today’s times.

At the end of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis brought out an Apostolic Letter (released on 20 Nov. 2016), titled, *Misericordia et Misera* (Mercy and Misery). In it he writes, “Now, at the conclusion of this Jubilee, it is time to look to the future and to understand how best to continue, with joy, fidelity and enthusiasm, experiencing the richness of divine mercy. Our communities can remain alive and active in the work of the new evangelization in the measure that the “pastoral conversion” to which we are called will be shaped daily by the renewing force of mercy. Let us not limit its action; let us not sadden the Spirit, who constantly points out new paths to take in bringing to everyone the Gospel of salvation”.

For the last two months my team and the sisters of the community here at Bandra have started a new simple project called, ‘Share and Care’ just outside our gate. Here we try to share our little something with the poor and the hungry in the area.

More than giving them some water and snacks to eat, it is their lives that are becoming part of our lives and there is a new birth taking place in each one of us.

Could we then during this season possibly start first with putting up on our community boards pictures of the poor, the homeless, the refugees and the migrants and then start planning how we could be among the poor and do concrete things for them?

May I suggest that you all discuss the specifics in your community: visit one or two poor families of your students or in the neighbourhood and provide for the month’s ration or urgently needed money for medicines or any other need you deem necessary so as to celebrate Christmas with Mary ‘our sister’ amidst our poor.

I believe that it would be a great gesture in identifying to some extent the enormous difficulties that Mary and Joseph faced as they brought that Child into the world – who makes our Christmas possible and who is the reason for the world to celebrate this season.

On behalf of my team I wish you all a blessed Advent and a Happy Christmas with more enthusiasm for the New Year 2017.

Sr. M. Nirmalini A.C.
Provincial Superior

NB: Just as my circular was ready for printing, there arrived the Superior General’s circular. At the end of it I found something similar to what I had written. Instead of changing that I thought that a similar suggestion coming from two sources confirms the working of the Holy