

## **Christmas - a Love Story ever lived**

Dear brothers and sisters in St. Francis of Assisi, we are almost at the threshold of Christmas. Christmas is here and we are called to celebrate. Have we prepared ourselves for His coming? Whether we are ready or not, He is ready and willing to come to us if we only let Him in our hearts. He is in our midst; His name is Emmanuel, God with us, a God who came as the savior, a God who came to share His love with us and a God who came to live with us always as Emmanuel.

Christmas is a Love Story; the greatest Love story ever told and ever lived, the story of God's love for us. *"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life"* (Jn 3:16). The primary reason for the incarnation of God's son is Love, as our Franciscan spirituality teaches us. Love needs no reason but to love. God in love with humanity humbled himself to make a dwelling among us. This act of God is unfathomable. The almighty God came to live with us, so that we the weak and fragile humans could learn to live as children of God the loving father. The savior was born in the silence of the night and not in the splendor of the day. Mary and Joseph with the baby in the manger with the company of few shepherds and their herd speak of the poverty, humility and simplicity of God. To this St. Francis of Assisi was passionately in love with and he wanted to recall the memory of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger, and how the ox and ass stood by and share that experience with the people of Greccio, thus created the first nativity scene on Christmas Eve of the year 1223.

"No room in the inn" replied the innkeeper. Whatever may be our judgment about the innkeeper, but it does not suggest that he was a bad guy, he just did not have a room, he was fully booked for the night, and he already had all he could handle. Once, a group of students were scheduled for the Christmas pageant. The student, who was given the role of the innkeeper, did not show up on the scheduled day for the Christmas pageant. The teacher was in panic and chose a new student (John) to play the role of the innkeeper and told him that when Mary and Joseph ask for a room in the inn, he has to just say "No room in the inn." Mary and Joseph approached the innkeeper and asked for a room, the student replied, "No room in the inn." As Mary and Joseph left the place, John was in tears and moved with compassion, ran after them and said there is no room in the inn but I have a room in my house. That's a genuine love for the needy; John made a space for them. He made a space for Jesus in his life and house. At times our hearts and lives are too full for Christ to have a place. Our life is full and booked up for all secondary reasons that the primary does not have a room. Not only at Christmas but every day we are called to make room for God in our lives like John who played the role of the innkeeper.

The Christmas story tells us that there is a way out of our sinfulness and hopelessness, because God is with us. We are not alone. As Emmanuel, Jesus lives in the sacraments (especially in the Holy Eucharist), in the Holy Bible, in the praying community and in each believer. Christmas celebrates the entry of God into the world as a bright light shining in the darkness. So, like Jesus the light, we are then to be lights amid darkness and rays of hope amid despair. Covid-19 pandemic cannot stop the light and hope that we have in Jesus. Now that we have the vaccine, we will be able to win the battle in the coming future. But as said before, more than the vaccine, we need the pandemic of love around us to end all the virus of evil around us.

***So, in celebrating Christmas, let us be ever mindful and grateful for the Love of a God who came as the Savior, a God who came to share His Love and a God who came to live with us as Emmanuel. Merry Christmas!***