

Celebrating Christmas

BETWEEN ACCEPTANCE AND CONTEMPLATION



Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you... You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger (Luca 2,11-12).

Dear confreres

We are approaching the celebration of the great mystery of the Incarnation, caught by amazement and dazzled by the light that comes to us from the crib. A mystery that we must always make it part of our missionary life as a source of inspiration in the process of insertion into new contexts and missionary challenges. Beginning with Jesus, Missionary of the Father, the missionaries have always had to go through a process of incarnation that involves becoming small and stripping themselves of what can be an obstacle to welcoming new realities (Philippians 2: 6).

We read in an old diary of Omdurman's mission: *"I arrived yesterday in Omdurman. This Sunday morning, very early, I wake up with the refrain of the muezzin inviting to prayer. Later, the bells of the Coptic church ring to invite the faithful to the Sunday's celebration. I get up because I have to accompany a veteran missionary from Sudan to celebrate Mass in a chapel far from this centre. Thus begins a new stage of my life in Sudan, where the Lord has sent me. He will lead my steps in the midst of this people, whom God loves and who will become also my people"*.

This new beginning of the "African mission" of a young missionary reminds us to all our confreres who, scattered in so many parts of the world, bear witness to God's love for humanity. The encounter of the members of the GC with each one of you, during their visits to the provinces and in personal dialogues, makes us realise how God continues his incarnation today among the peoples. The incarnation of the Word, in fact, is not an isolated event, circumscribed to a certain time and space of history. It is an ongoing process. From the moment the Word became flesh, from the day when the angels have announced this joyful news, God continues to become incarnate "today", as at the beginning, in a surprising and unique way. We, as we take part in this event, are asked to have the same attitude of the shepherds: the ability to be surprised and to marvel, as we let the mystery unfold us with its Light and the Word dwell in ourselves and in the world.

"Today" is the moment in which God makes himself present, the kairos that is offered to us and which we must welcome with joy, the day when "the grace of God has appeared" (Titus 2:11). "Today" is the time of the census carried out at the time of Caesar Augustus and also the time when

the people of Israel awaited the realisation of God's promises. It is the day when walls that divide are built, but also the day in which many doors are opened to bring life and hope.

To time we add space, the place where God surprises us and which will always be a meaningful place for us. Omdurman is like the icon of the missions, geographical, anthropological and cultural places that God has chosen for us. Places that will always be a new Bethlehem, the "house of bread", where God disconcerts us and invites us to wonder. Bethlehem is the place of grace, the place in which we find ourselves and in which we are invited to welcome the Bread that is offered to us so that we share it with everyone else. It is not by chance that the place of God's incarnation is called Bethlehem.

To speak of time and place means to speak of peoples, cultures, concrete situations, where each of us is experiencing moments of joy and sadness, of hope and disappointment, of peace and war. These situations are God's gift that we are called to welcome with joy and hope, because it is there that the Word becomes flesh, God becomes a child and the first becomes the last. There our whole being is in a daze, invited to silence, respect and contemplation: *"I entered it, and although birth is more joyful than death, I was nonetheless more moved than on Calvary, at the thought of a condescension of a God who humbled himself to the point of being born in this manger"* (W 111).

With St. Daniel Comboni we are invited to contemplate the Child, to be moved by this mystery and to marvel at the action of God in the heart of humanity.

At the end of this 2018, the GC thanks the Lord with you for the events lived together throughout this year, like the journey of Revisitation and Revision of the RL and the Intercapitular Assembly. At the same time, the GC wishes everyone a Holy Christmas and a New Year 2019 full of the presence of the Child of Bethlehem who will continue to surprise us on the mission paths.

The General Council

Natale 2018