

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

With joy and hope and once again we celebrate Christmas. It is the celebration of love of God incarnated and the mercy of God dwelt among us. Each Christmas season comes with a clarion call for us to be more humane and humble and to be grateful to God. In the present context, Christmas is a time for all of us to become aware of our peace-making and healing presence in this world.

Christmas reminds us of God's self-emptying love. The incarnation tells us the story of God's love that prompted him to share his very being and having



with the human race as an expression of his intimacy with them. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Giving and self-emptying is the nature of God. And Jesus' life was indeed a synonym for this love. His taking of the human form, "not considering equality with God as something to be retained," "becoming like a slave" and embracing of poverty are the expressions of his unique love. We are in a world where amassing and accumulating has become the order of the day. But God, through Christmas reminds us that it's giving and mutual sharing is the more blessed way. We are called to go into that self-emptying nature of God. Hence, the spirit of Christmas exhorts us, "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

One of the most important gifts that Jesus shared with us is his peace. He was born as the "Prince of Peace" and always reminded us about our peace-making mission in this world. More than the absence of war or problems, the peace envisaged by Jesus is the total well-being and perfect harmony. The Jesus' way of peace is more integral and liberating one. It points to the possibilities of having healthy relationships between persons through mutual understanding and acceptance. When we are able to maintain healthy relationships with God, others, nature and oneself he or she experiences the real peace. The peace envisioned by Jesus will originate only in a lifestyle based on justice, reconciliation and forgiving love. As Pope Francis declares in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, the art of peace is the result of the happy blending of justice, mercy and truth and such a situation will take place only in an all-inclusive context beyond borders and barriers. Christmas, the festival of *shalom* reminds us of becoming peace-makers than mere peace-lovers in this world.

The birth of Jesus reminds us of the lifestyle of simplicity. His life was so simple and down to earth. From his birth in a manger at Bethlehem to his death on a cross at Calvary he showed the beauty of simplicity. More than the external appearance, this simplicity points towards the inner attitude. It is the capacity to win over one's own

ego and selfish motives, the openness to embrace everyone beyond the material considerations. In our personal and communitarian life, we need such a simplicity to be more authentic witnesses of Christ. Amidst the culture of megalomania and pompous show-offs, the Babe of Bethlehem challenges us to make a difference through our simpler and sincere lifestyle. In a world characterized by fragmentation and divisions, our communities need to be strengthened by networks of relationships moulded by simplicity.

We are going through a tough time. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire world and effected a telling change in the human life by creating a new order to our lives. The whole world is struggling to find the meaning of life in this new situation. Christmas 2020 is very different from all the previous years. With travel restrictions and social gathering norms in place, we may feel that our celebrations are restricted. But the joy and peace of Christmas is always there and we are called to share it with the world. Let's be healers of the world as Christmas tells us the story of the birth of a healing God. Let's heal the wounds of the people around us. May our presence and pro-active steps help our suffering humanity to restore the meaning of their lives. Let the self-emptying love of God revealed at Christmas be an inspiration for us to care, share and support each other in this period of crisis.

This year the good Lord has blessed us with 56 young CMIs who will be ordained as priests immediately after Christmas. Let's thank the Lord and pray for them in a special way. May all of them become healers of this wounded world.

As we are approaching the 150th anniversary of the entry into the heavenly abode of our founder St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, let us recall our great legacy and heritage and try to rekindle that spirit in us.

Wishing you peace and Joy of Christmas! May the New Year 2021 be healthier and happier!

Yours in the Lord,

Fr. Thomas Chathamparampil CMI

Prior General