

CHRISTMAS FOR THE LEAST

“In those days it was issued an order from Caesar August ordering that everybody should be registered”

(Lc 2.1)

According to Luke's data, the birth of Jesus took place at a time when the imperial power of Rome was holding a census of all the inhabited Earth. Such a initiative fitted Roman empire's purpose to tie up all subjected peoples under just one system of political dominion.

From Nazareth then, Joseph headed Bethlehem the city of David. Following the order ("*dogma*" in Greek) issued by Caesar August, he was on his way to register himself along with his wife Maria, who happened to be pregnant by the time. Kings or absolute rulers used to ambition counting on a precise register of the people who were under his rule, in order to hold an iron-fist control on them. Ironically enough, the evangelist emphasizes that despite its burning desire not to lose glance of anything by doing so, the imperial power actually had lost sight of an outstanding event which in fact should mark a turning point in the history of humankind, the most important data indeed: the birth of Jesus, the Saviour (Lc 2.11).

Not the decree of Caesar, but the word of Christ would decide the destiny of the human race. Emperor August used to emphasize "saviour" among his honorary titles. According to him, peace would be just an aftermath of the overwhelming rule of Rome over all nations. Such a peace, of course, should be imposed on the defeated ones through military means. For Jesus however, things do not proceed like that. He was worshipped from birth with the titles of Saviour, Messia, Lord. Through his teaching Jesus shows that peace is achieved only when every power gives up its forceful strenght, and salvation is reached when the unconditional love of God is accepted. Peace and salvation aren't but gifts graciously bestowed by God to show his benevolence towards all people, nobody excluded. Therefore emperor's armies are not useful any more to guarantee order and security within the inhabited Earth. Now, it suffices welcoming the peace announced by celestial armies crowds: "*Gloria to God in the heights and peace on Earth to the men whom God loves*" (Lc 2.14). Glory is given to God in the heights when men can enjoy fraternal peace on earth.

The gospel writer chooses to read history from a different stand-point. He does not look at it from the powerful and important ones' perspective, in other words, he refuses reasoning as those convinced that the world's destiny lies in their own hands do, but from the optics of God, who sides always with the poor and the smallest. Because of the imperial order, Jesus will be born in the city of David, the place of origin of the Messia as prophet Malacchi had announced (Mal 5, 1). However, the religious tradition about the davidic Messia will have to face a very shocking news: he will be no more the son of David, he is instead the son of God.

The Saviour in fact, the one who will grant freedom to the nations will not display any powerful performance when appearing in this world, like king David used to do. He will show himself a fragile baby wrapped in diapers and placed in a manger. He will not establish his reign by violent means, but by means of love; he will not remove the life of the enemies, he will instead offer his life for them. The shepherds were the first people in receiving the news of the saviour's birth. They were regarded impure people and were relegated to the lowest position in the social scale. Still, even if they are set aside by the society, marginalized by the religion and despised by the men, the Lord does not address them as a judge, but as the very source of love: *"I announce a great joy to you, that will be for all nations: it has been born to you today, in the city of David, a saviour, who is Christ the Lord"* (Lc 2,10-11).

The newness which Jesus brought and the gospel writer anticipated by presenting the birth story, is no more than the image of an exclusively good God. God is a Father who does not exert dominion on the human beings nor puts them under, a Father who empower and enables men in order to arise them up to his same divine condition. With the birth of Jesus it takes place the greater revolution in the history of humanity: man can finally widely open his eyes to understand that God loves him.

When the human being realizes to be loved by God in a personal and unique way, then all his life becomes anew, his existence acquiring a brand-new value. The shepherds, first to all in hearing such good tidings, understand that God does not love men according to their merits (actually they don't have any), but God's love is an answer to the necessities of the people. They used to live overwhelmed by the fear of God's terrible punishment, now they get overwhelmed with the unconditional love of God. They were thought of as the least of society and, therefore, were regarded the most far away people from God, a kind of people unable to experience

the divine action. Now, once they have been surrounded by the light of the Lord, they can accomplish the same mission that used to be attributed to the angels, who were considered the beings nearest to God, that is, to praise and to glorify him: *"the shepherds returned praising and glorifying God by announcing everything they had heard and seen, according to what had been said to them"* (Lc 2, 20).

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