

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. (Lk 2:1-7)

Amen!

A different Christmas

Christmas 2020 will be a Christmas like no other. Many churches will be closed for Christmas Eve services. Grandparents and great-grandparents won't be able to host the traditional Christmas dinner, as the risk of spreading the deadly virus is as great as the spreading the of the joy of Christmas. Christmas 2020 will never be forgotten.

Humour helps us get through tough times. There is an explanation after all, for why the situation is what it is. Mary and Joseph can't leave home and go to Bethlehem because they are in lockdown. The Wise Men are forbidden to travel and have to work from home. Even Santa's elves are limited to working in teams of two while maintaining a 2 meter distance. Santa himself is in a high-risk group and is not allowed to visit children. To top it all off, Rudolph is forced to self-isolate on account of his red nose.

Such jokes make us smile and lighten our mood for a short while. But the real joy of Christmas is the same this year as it has always been and always will be. The real joy is found in the message of God's love. God comes to us in the form of baby Jesus, no matter what the circumstance. Whether we are healthy and strong or ill and weak. A Saviour is born in the City of David!

Jesus was not born during a time of peace and goodwill. It was a time of tension and unrest. Those familiar with history will recognize that the towns mentioned in the Gospel are even today associated with strife and are symbols of unresolved battles. The town of Bethlehem in today's Palestine has been the site of many battles. Syria is a war-torn country tens of thousands are fleeing from. Dictatorships and their do's and dont's that destroy the lives of thousands and create enmity exist in today's world. When Jesus was born, the world was not devoid of occupations and fights for freedom. The coming of the Messiah, who would bring peace and equilibrium, was fervently awaited then, in the same way as we today look for solutions to the global disasters that befall us. Times were as anxious then as they are now.

Jesus was born of God's love so that hope would replace fear, reconciliation would overcome conflict and love would conquer hate. This is the message of the timeless Christmas gospel. The miracles that God creates happen during ordinary times. When we are going about our day-to-day activities. When people gathered in Bethlehem to be taxed, no one noticed the young woman about to give birth. In the commotion, the singing of angels went unnoticed and the wonder of the event was not understood. People would have been focused on the increase in taxes and the impact on their households and businesses.

It was the shepherds in the fields tending their flock that were needed to bring home the miracle of the birth of Jesus. It was the Wise Men from a far away land who were needed to witness the birth of the King of Heaven. To witness the love of God, we must be prepared to lift our eyes away from our earthly worries toward the light of Heaven.

My wish for all of us during this season of Advent and Christmas, is to notice the blessed moments when God's love shines on us and warms our hearts.

Yes, this Christmas will be different. But no two Christmases are ever the same. What remains the same however is our mutual caring and consideration.

I wish you all a blessed Advent and Christmas season!

Dean Mart Salumäe