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The Rt. Rev'd C. Leopold Friday, B.A., M.A.

Bishop's Christmas Message 2016

At Christmas we celebrate the incarnation, the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. So the theme at Christmas is Immanuel "God With Us." The question is; are we celebrating the birth of a baby? For, He came as a babe in Bethlehem of Judea over two thousand years ago. Quite often that's the way we would like him to remain. It is comforting for us to remember him as an infant, with shepherds and wise men who gave glory to God and sang songs of great joy and praise, and who brought him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh and all the good cheer that surrounds our celebration of his birth.

In our natural lives we celebrate the birth of a child with great joy and festivity and eventually the child grows up into an adult. The way in which we respond, on that child's, now come adult, birthday, depends on the personality, attitude and contribution he or she has made/ is making to the family, home, village, community, and society. The celebration is not the same as when the child was born. Who the child has grown to be, has a great influence on the type of birthday celebration. In relation to Jesus Christ we seem to forget this. Our celebration quite often does not take into consideration Jesus, the Adult Son of God.

Now that he is no longer an infant, a babe lying in a manger but the adult Son of God who suffered and died upon the cross to save the world from sin and its consequences, and to challenge evil, unrighteousness, and corruption and to bring peace, justice and righteousness. We tend to pay less attention to him and to disregard the path through which he leads us. It is no longer simply the celebration of the birth of a baby, but becoming aware and being more conscious of the harsh realities of life and to believe that God is with us in and through all the changing scenes of life.

This is not to negate the importance of celebrating Christmas with joy, and happiness. What it says is that such celebrations must be rooted and grounded in a deep and abiding relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is not a matter of pointing the finger at others and naming their sin, shortcomings, corruption, dishonesty, weaknesses, and unrighteous deeds and acclaiming our own self-righteousness. Rather it is an acknowledgement of our own sin, misdemeanors, wrongdoings, misbehaviours and indiscretions, and to acknowledge that because of Christmas we have forgiveness of sins. Thus there is an open invitation for us to be a people who forgive and who seek reconciliation and peace.

Presently in the world there seems to be a lot of anger and an increasing inability to resolve conflicts peacefully. In this context, may we not promote the naming, blaming and shaming game. Rather may we be mentors, facilitators, counsellors and agents of transformation, peace and reconciliation.

We all have our own expectations and opinions as to who God is and what God should do in the world. Christmas reminds us that it is into this world with all its challenges, difficulties, dishonesty, natural disasters, disease and illnesses, disappointments, violence, crime and sin, God enters. God is in the midst working his purpose out, second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, and decade by decade. It is in God's own time that the world will be transformed.

There are several things happening around us, but perhaps they are too ordinary. We desire that which is dramatic, extravagant spectacular and instant. There is a lot that Christian people and the Church are doing following the example of Jesus which goes unnoticed. For it is not sensational, nor flamboyant.

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ came telling stories, eating with sinners, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and God's moral demands, healing the sick, lame, deaf, blind, dumb and delivering people from demons and evil spirits. Amidst all this, the Jews continued to live under Roman domination. John who is the forerunner of Jesus is still in prison and basically the world remained the same. There was no catapulting, no dramatic event to bring an end to Israel's plight as a nation. It is in and through the common and ordinary things of life that God is working God's purpose out.

It is a question of faith. Do we believe the truth of Christmas, of the Incarnation, that God is in the world just as it is. As messy as it can be, working God's purpose out and in God's own time, the Kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of God.

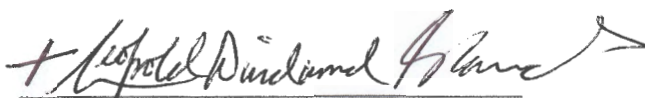
At Christmas we celebrate a religious festival because we are a people of faith. And it is by and through faith that in spite of all the violence, crime, natural disasters, disease and illnesses, greed, dishonesty, corruption, unrighteousness and sin, we believe that God is in control, that God is with us transforming the world and in God's own time this will be revealed in all its fullness.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." John 10:10.

"I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!" John 16:33.

I take this opportunity on behalf of my wife Lois and three daughters, Marcella, Malaika and Mikayla to wish you all a Blessed and Holy Christmas and a Happy and Peaceful 2017.

Your friend and Bishop

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Leopold Friday". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

The Rt. Rev'd C. Leopold Friday
Bishop of the Windward Islands