

Goethals News

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The Child

The *Child* is the only poem of Rabindranath Tagore, which is originally written in English. The piece was composed in July 1930 after his visit to the village of Oberammergau, 40 miles from Munich, Germany. Tagore visited the place to watch the traditional passion plays of Jesus Christ, held every ten years. That the Birth of Jesus made a deep and lasting impression on Tagore is evident from this poem. It was later translated into Bengali as *Sishutirtha* (Pilgrimage to Childhood) in Punashca.

The Child is a recurrent metaphor in Tagore's poems. The passion plays coalesced in the poet's imagination and he conceived the Child in the

harmony of creative impulse in the course of a night. Tagore finds humanity striving to transcend the burden of frustration and failure, breaking, yet refusing to be defeated and persevering with the quest. Man contains in himself the spirit of his redemption and one day, the Newborn; the divine Child shall triumph towards glorious fulfillment.

The poem is in ten sections and the actions pause and heave like the eternal waves of the sea. The poem blends the cultural contexts of the East and West, of impressionistic description and profound prophecy. This impression on Tagore's mind is further borne out by his translation of Eliot's Ariel Poem, "Journey of

the Magi" (*Tirtho Jatri*) in search of the Divine Infant. Tagore had acknowledged the impact of Eliot's poem, the obvious reason being that the scene of the Nativity seems to have deeply moved him. Tagore was profoundly influenced and deeply inspired by *Ave Maria*.

Tanushree Shankar has choreographed it. Her interpretation depicts a flowing, rhythmic spiritual journey of man through the ages from the bondage of ignorance to the freedom of enlightenment and self-realization. It is only hope and faith that take him along to the newness of life offered by the Child, full of divinity. We present the beautiful poem here for the readers to look around and see The Child:



The Child Jesus of Milk Grotto

The Director and
the Staff
wish all readers
A Grace-filled
Christmas and
joy-filled
New Year 2013.



The Child

The first flush of dawn glistens on the dew-
dripping leaves of the forest.
The man who reads the sky cries:
"Friends, we have come!"
They stop and look around.
On both sides of the road
the corn is ripe to the horizon,
the glad golden answer of the earth
to the morning light.
The current of daily life moves slowly
between the village near the hill
and the one by the riverbank.
The potter's wheel goes round; the woodcutter
brings fuel to the market,
the cowherd takes his cattle to the pasture,
and the woman with the pitcher on her head
walk to the well.
But where is the King's castle, the mine of gold,
the secret book of magic,
the sage who knows love's utter wisdom?
"The stars cannot be wrong,"
assures the reader of the sky.
"Their signal points to that spot."
And reverently he walks to a wayside spring
from which wells up a stream of water, a liquid
light, like the morning melting
into a chorus of tears and laughter

Near it in a palm grove
surrounded by a strange
hush stands a leaf-thatched
hut
at whose portal sits the poet
of the unknown shore, and
sings:

"Mother, open the gate!"
A ray of morning sun strikes
aslant at the door.

The assembled crowd feels in their blood the
primeval chant of creation:

"Mother, open the gate!"

The gate opens.

The mother is seated on a straw bed with the babe
on her lap,

Like the dawn with the morning star.

The sun's ray that was waiting at the door outside
falls on the head of the child.

The poet strikes his lute and sings out:

"Victory to Man, the new-born, the ever-living!"

They kneel down, -- the king and the beggar, the
saint and the sinner,

the wise and the fool, -- and cry:

"Victory to Man, the New-Born, the Ever-
Living!"

The old man from the East murmurs to himself:

"I have seen!"

-Rabindranath Tagore



The Milk Grotto

The **Milk Grotto** (Magharet Sitti **Mariam** - "Grotto of the Lady Mary") is a serene grotto a ten minutes' walk from Manger Square in Bethlehem.

This grotto, with a Franciscan chapel built above it, is considered sacred because tradition has it that the Holy Family took refuge here during the Slaughter of the Innocents, before their flight into Egypt. Tradition has it that while Mary was nursing Jesus here; a **drop of milk** fell to the ground, turning the rock white.

The grotto is hollowed out of the soft white rock. A church was built here by the **5th century**, and mosaic fragments on the terrace of the grotto, with geometrical motifs and crosses, are thought to belong to this

time.

Both **Christians and Muslims** believe scrapings from the stones and rocks in the grotto boost the quantity of a mother's milk and enhance fertility. Mothers usually mix it in their drinking water or milk; would-be mothers place a piece of the rock under their mattress. The grotto has been much more than a pilgrimage to many couples from all over the world.

There is also an old tradition that identifies this as the burial site of the young victims of Herod's Slaughter of the Innocents. There is a chapel dedicated to them in the caves beneath the Church of St. Catherine.

"Faith is a gift from God. We who have been baptized have to be open



Exterior and Entrance to the Milk Grotto

to the Spirit for our faith to be alive
and that will enrich us." – Brother
Lawrence

Christmas at Kolkata

Christmas and the sentiments it generates - the search for the perfect tree, with the accompanying decorations, the annual visit to Nahoum's for the pure plum cake, the mulled wine and the roast turkey, the leisurely X-mas day lunch, the mid night mass, the face of Park Street decked up in fairy lights, the bonhomie and conviviality - the yuletide season is a time for unbridled indulgence and cheer. Rampant consumerism has commercialized my favourite festival but the charm still lingers. School for us at Christmas time meant a welcome slackening of the reigns - the choral singing and the Nativity plays broke the dull monotony of lessons. Now that I have grown up, the significance

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of this day has subtly changed. The birth of Christ is a metaphor for new light of life, the harbinger of peace on earth and goodwill to men, and it means more now - it is letting go, of past grievances and frustrations; it is a clean slate on

which to script new beginning. The "amazing grace" of Christ's birth transforms the Scrooge present in all of us, inspiring us to be the best we can become.

Now as I see Christmas through the eyes of my children, with their unquestioning faith in the benevolent presence of Santa Claus and the simplicity of their belief in the triumph of good over evil, I wish that I too had retained this untarnished innocence. I know now that the path ahead is full of pains and promises and that questions have no easy answers, but Christmas and all its accoutrements reaffirms my faith in God's goodness and his grace and reassures me of the spring that sustains our further steps.

Christmas - A Divine Encounter

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were created by him. In him was life, and the life was the light of humankind. And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it... He is the true light, who gives light to everyone. The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We saw his glory-- full of grace and truth. (John 1: 1-14).

St. Ignatius of Loyola has a profound contemplation on the **Incarnation**. "Three Divine Persons look down upon the whole expanse of all the earth, filled with human beings (in great diversity in dress and acting, some are white, some black, some at peace and some at war; some weeping, some laughing; some well, some sick;

some coming into the world and some dying; etc. Since they see all nations in great blindness and that people are descending into hell, they decree in their eternity that the Second Person should become man to save the human race. So when the fullness of time came, they sent the Angel Gabriel to Mary in Nazareth" (*Spiritual Exercises*, Week Two, First Contemplation, Nos: 102-109).

"Joseph and Mary, the parents of Jesus, traveled from Nazareth in Galilee to King David's town, Bethlehem in Judea to be enrolled in the census. While they were there, Mary gave birth to a son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger since there was no accommodation in the inn. On the eighth day they named him Jesus" (Luke 2:1-7). In the manger one encounters the power of simplicity, the depth of humility, the richness of spiritual poverty and the wonder of **divine communion with the human**.

Gurudeb Rabindranath has touchingly and succinctly brought out this aspect of divine encounter in human life in his song: "Have you not heard his silent steps? **He comes, comes, ever comes**. Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes. I surrendered my mind without struggle to the maze of shadows and songs".

A significant message of Christmas is that of joyous giving. The Story of Santa Claus explains this dimension of Christmas. It is centered on the mission of love and giving. The more we give the more we receive. God loves those who love not themselves but others. The spirit of Christmas makes every person other-centered, people-centered. Jesus said: "**There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for his fellow being**" (John 15:13).

Wishing you all a Joy-filled Christmas and the Blessings of the Infant Jesus.

- Fr. Dr. J. Felix Raj, SJ

MAILS & EMAILS



★ Very helpful staff and a useful collection of Journals that I could not find anywhere else. **Katherine Mehta**, Delhi.

★ A pure treasure well-preserved, extensive catalogue and great accessibility. Thanks a lot valuing this eternal heritage. **Sreya Chatterjee**, Kolkata.



New Arrivals

Christian Directory of West Bengal by P. Detienne S.J., Brahma Mission Press, Kolkata, 1971.

Origins of The Anglo-Indian Community by G.A Wilson-deRoze, Kolkata, 2001.

Total Stress Relief by Lizzie Hutchins, Judy Piatkus Limited, London, 2003.

Your Seven Energy Centers by Elizabeth Clare Prophet, Health Harmony, B. Jain Publishers Ltd., New Delhi, 2001.



Researchers at the Research Centre

Researchers at Goethals

Dr. Fleur D'Souza, Dr. Anita Rane and Joan Dias on Indo-Christian History, Bombay Social History, Mumbai

Dr. Suranjan Midday on Christian Ministry and India, Kolkata.

Katherine Mehta on South India Archaeology, Delhi

M^a Claudias Alves on Portuguese Presence in India, Portugal.

Ragina Hofer on Indian Art History, Indian Photography, Germany.

Rowena Robinson on Social Anthropology, Guwahati.

Sreya Chatterjee on Portuguese Presence in India, Kolkata.

Thais Tavesna Chaim on Portuguese Presence in India, Brazil.

Uday Chandra on Tribal History and State Formation in Chota Nagpur, Ranchi.



May this Christmas be
bright and cheerful
and may the
New Year begin on a
prosperous note!
Merry Christmas and
Happy New Year!

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