



Christmas decorations at St. Lucia's Cathedral, Kothahena



The grotto of Our Blessed Virgin Mary at St. Anthony's Church, Kollupetiya



The Crucifix at All Saint's Church, Borella



St. Lawrence's Church, Wellawatta

Christmas splendour



St. Mary's Church, Bambalapitiya



St. Joseph's Church, Nugegoda

The Christmas spirit is in the air. In just four days Midnight Mass will be said in all the major churches across the world marking the arrival of yet another Christmas.

On the eve of Christmas, the Sunday Observer staff photographers could not evade the glimmers of some of the major churches in Colombo and suburbs getting ready to celebrate Christmas!

Pic: Kavindra Perera

Page designed by Navindra Merinag



St. Lucia's Cathedral, Kothahena

All Saint's Church, Borella

Spirit of Christmas ushers in new social order

by Miran Perera

The real meaning of Christmas is not the star. It's not an angel choir or shabby shepherds and Royal Kings. Neither is Christmas, bells or candles or candle lit windows. The message of Christmas is easy to feel and yet difficult to define because the Message of Christmas is couched in a paradox of love. We are immersed in mystery which seems to deepen and become more intense with every morsel of man into the realm of the unknown, the absurd, the transcendent and the ultimate. This revelation invites us to give the mystery a name that is 'love' (in 4:8). Revelation leads us to the other side of the pole, we name it nothingness. At Christmas God comes to us in the form of a Babe, helpless. A tiny Babe at once needs the best in human beings. It tugs at our hearts. Just that way God comes to us to win our love. A baby is a sign of hope. Christian spirituality is graced consciousness

that bequeals increasing and ever deepening awareness of the mystery of the spirit of love that underlies all things on one side and the frail conditionality that characterises creatureliness on the other. Remember Christmas is couched in a paradox of love. Humanism as a spirituality is to live within the realm that is reached by scientific, national knowledge or any other form of human effort. It may constitute a way of life in which good or bad, right or wrong is defined in terms of the norms of morally established within the area of discovery. There are other spiritualities which carry their own specificity. At Christmas and in our lives God must be given the first priority. What exactly does this mean? Is it just that we say our morning prayers before commencing day-to-day our activities? Does giving God the first priority stop from just there? Thereafter are we free to live life as we please? Taking a look at the Christmas story we

can see how God was given priority. How did they do so? By abiding in the will of God constantly. It was not just one act which they performed but their whole lives were bent towards doing the will of God. For the birth of Christ and what we call Christmas today Our Mother Mary and St. Joseph both completely surrendered to God's will. They put aside their own wants, likes and dislikes, pleasures and pains to bow down to the will of God. Doesn't it strike you that somewhere along the way Christians seem to have left Christ out of Christmas? Christians who seem to have been dormant most of the year have a way of coming alive at Christmas. For them it is an endless round of parties, feasting, giving and receiving of gifts etc.... Some have already spent thousands of rupees on a ticket for a night of feasting and dancing at a live star hotel to usher in the festive season, Christmas and New Year. Is this not a kind

of blasphemy? Do we know the real meaning of Christmas? Do we know the event it celebrates? It is Christ's birthday we are supposed to celebrate. The spirit of Christmas should be based on the teaching of the religion. Under the abiding inspiration of the Holy Spirit, man's consciousness is able to discern the innermost longing in his depths (1. Thes. 5:2-3) calls it spirit, for fulfilment. Man would long to be liberated from the materialism of life as well as from the harm that he falls him from what is traditionally called the world, flesh and the devil. As man continues to walk in the spirit he would have words like that of Isaiah (40:1, 48). At Christmas the festive lights and the gifts and the ornaments are one but they are only a setting for the real jewel, the birth of a baby that marked the descent of God Himself to mankind. That's where the true meaning of Christmas lies. Christmas is

love in action. Today even after 2000 years, the true message of Christmas that God planned and initiated through Jesus Christ to liberate man from the fetters of evil and to ensure peace and freedom had had very little impact. Therefore there exists an urgent need to re-ignite Christmas. On the contrary there are in vast segments in society who are disillusioned due to the injustice exploitation and oppression by unfair and unjust socio political and economic systems that have denied many a new life freedom dignity and the opportunity to live as useful and responsible members of society. We should look at the manner in which Christmas is celebrated by the majority of Christians all over the world. A non-Christian is treated to a distasteful opinion and impression of the sacred event and happenings at Christmas and its no way the real cognition of the birth of a God and any mystical idea of the in-

carnation of the God man. Therefore a true Christian view of God should be that of an intimate and forgiving being a condition made possible by the incarnation. We should therefore re-ignite the great event of Christmas. Revelation in the Christian sense tells us that transcendent or boundless love re-ignited as the spirit lovers ever nothingness. The spirit keeps everything going, be it in the area of the intelligible to man or in the unknown. The holy spirit brightens human consciousness to enable man to be increasingly aware of an inner longing within him for fairness and liberation from the transient, the impermanent, the closed up unliberated state that is.

Also to be open to the spirit's workings and the spirit's presence or absence from the sphere of human or non human activity. It behooves man's consciousness to remain passive or active not only in the area of the rationally intelligible but to be raised up to its full god given potential. Christmas is a God-given time to think of the lowly, the have-nots, and those oppressed and marginalized. People in need are left desolate and abandoned in their hour of crisis and trial. They are completely deserted. Christ said, 'The poor you will have with you always.' He was truly aware of the suffering and poverty. Should we not reflect and ponder deeply in what Christ said at least during this Christmas? Unfortunately today there is a colony of Christmas who fail to see, realize and face the stark realities that confront these unfortunate ones in our society. A needy person is not a beggar. We should lend a helping hand to those who have been less fortunate and estranged.

It is our bounden duty and obligation through noble deeds to bring new life and hope for them to live with honour, dignity and self respect. This is their God-given birth right. By asking people to care, share and give, the Christ did not mean from the rich to the rich. He certainly did not expect and wanted Christmas celebrated in such a cavalier fashion. Today as one can observe the true cherished values of Christmas are no longer seen in the festivities. We must together re-ignite the spirit of Christmas and do away with extravagance, merry-making and conscious tipping. The true, and a meaningful Christmas spirit must prevail. A re-ignited spirit of Christmas should pervade every nook and corner of this country. It is then and then alone that Christmas could be what it was meant to be by the birth of Christ. The ardent hope of everyone during this Christmas should be of a new life in a new social order where brotherhood devoid of injustice, greed and hatred will orientate in Sri Lanka where a direction of the partnership of people will usher in peace and harmony in a nation of one people.