

# CHRISTMAS 2013

Christmas celebrates that extraordinary moment in human history when Jesus, the Son of God, took on our human nature and was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem in Judea. God came to  *dwell* (the verb used here means to “pitch his tent”) among us. In doing so, God lived with us and became like us in all things except sin so that, in Jesus, he would show us what true  *love* is (“ *agape love*” for those who have heard me wax on this subject before), how to be  *fully human*, and how  *to find our way back to him*.

Yes, Christmas is an event worth celebrating!



Nigerian Nativity Scene.

Imagine being alive at that time and being able to meet him in person!... being able to visit the child in the manger like the shepherds or the magi; or being a guest at the wedding feast in Cana; or listening to Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount; or watching him cure the sick and forgive the sinners... or indeed, watching him enter Jerusalem in triumph with the crowds waving palms and shouting “Hosanna!” Imagine watching him being crucified a week later on Calvary. As time-travel hasn’t yet been invented we are sadly unable to encounter him in any of these places the way the people of Palestine did two thousand years ago.

Yet our faith tells us that he is with us until the end of time and it is therefore true that we can encounter Jesus right now, today, through the power of the Holy Spirit. We only have to open our eyes to see him and our ears to hear him. **Emmanuel: God-with-us**. Good news indeed! He is not only with us, he is all around us and we really can meet him.

When was the last time you met Jesus? **I met him 10 times last week**. I met him in the guy who opened the door for me at the local supermarket because he saw my hands were full. He was also there in the girl at the check-out at the bus-station coffee-shop who had the beautiful smile and who really looked like she meant it when she wished me a good day. I definitely encountered his presence when I heard someone’s confession and witnessed their joy at being forgiven by God. I also saw him on the bus in the guy with the tattoos who gave his seat to a young mother with a small child, and again in the old man who squeezed \$5 into my hand outside the church after Mass and whispered “For the missions”.

I met the Lord in my fellow priest who gets up before everyone else every morning to prepare the coffee for the rest of us, and in the woman in the church who tidies up the mass books in the pews and changes the water in the flowers. He was present in the email I received from a guy who was asking for prayers for his friend who is sick, and also in the beautiful 'thank you' note I received from someone I had helped. I met him in a co-worker who went out of her way to help me with a job I was doing. I'm sure there were other instances, but these are the ones I remember.

**Emmanuel: "God-with-us"** – the true meaning of Christmas. He is always with us and if we open our eyes to see him and our ears to hear him, we surely will. This Christmas let us praise him for pitching his tent in our camp on that first Christmas day and for his presence all around us each moment of every day since. Let us pray that we learn to recognise him in our sisters and brothers. Sometimes we can be surprised where we find him!

I share the words of one of my favourite spiritual songs (I hope you know the tune!):

*Open my eyes, Lord, I want to see Jesus,  
to reach out and touch him, to say that I love him.  
Open my ears, Lord, and help me to listen;  
open my eyes, Lord, I want to see Jesus.*

Happy Christmas!

## Fr Pat

p.s. I wonder if you or I featured on anyone's list of 'Jesus-encounters' recently.

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"Christmas Greetings to all our Maltese Sponsors. With this Christmas message I am assuring each of you my prayers during this holy season and praying that you have a blessed and joyful Christmas. Thank you for your support of our mission work – without you and people like you, we would not be able to continue our missionary work in Africa. Thank you for your birthday donation for this year. If you have not yet made your donation – it's not too late!! God bless you and your family. Please remember us and our work in your own prayers. Fr Pat."

