



TRACI

Reflections

Theological Research And
Communication Institute

TREASURING UP

With Christmas round the corner, carols cannot be far behind. In an old BBC programme on Christmas carols that I was listening to the other day, the anchor asked the singers what Christmas meant to them. The response usually was, 'It is a time to be with family and friends.' The season resonates with such thoughts and however much we would like to bring Christ into our celebrations, the fact that Christmas is a time to be with family and friends is not lost on us. Last Christmas, most of us in India were in lockdown due to Covid, and the gatherings, if any, were small. Many could not meet family or friends. Few if any of us 'felt' the Christmas spirit pervade our homes. This year the circumstances around Covid seem to be better and, perhaps, it will be easier to meet with loved ones, to even travel, if we can, and wish to. However, at the same time, the year has been tough on many of us. The pandemic has brought the world to its knees, and many have lost dear ones. But, for many, the pandemic has not been the only reality. The ravages of nature, the misuse of state power, religious violence, unequal gender relations, economic inequalities have all been the cause of much pain and suffering, seemingly more so than ever. We may have been victims ourselves or may know victims who have thus suffered or even succumbed. The year has been devastating for many of us; there is no doubt about that. Christmas, this year, more than ever perhaps, brings with it a collective feeling of deep loss and pain; there seems to be distress that everyone can identify with. While such are the times we live in, the question remains as to how the Christmas story may speak to us amidst the sorrow and pain we have experienced as well as, dare I say, the joys and blessings we have experienced?

Two thoughts come to mind as I think about these things. Firstly, the birth of Christ is an occasion to consider our standing with God. The Christmas story amazes me not just because it is the story of God becoming man: it is also a story of how God involves humans as his co-workers in the great salvation plan that he has for humankind. Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men, Zechariah, Elizabeth and many others were important characters in the drama that unfolded around Christ's birth. The birth of Jesus involved God speaking and using mere mortals to further his plans for our salvation. How humbling it is to know that God does not work without the humans he has created although He is perfectly capable of doing so. What grace, what respect, what wonder for the very thing He has created. How wonderful and precious we are in His sight. While governments, peoples, institutions or even viruses may not have much respect for humans and humanity, the God of Creation deigns to use His creation for His purposes and to bring His plans to fruition. I cannot imagine a greater privilege, status, and calling.

In this great drama, the other great character that has often spoken to me is Mary. Mary, in Protestant circles, is often ignored, but even as we read about her in Luke, the verse that has always profoundly struck a chord with me is the verse that says, "she treasured up and pondered all these things in her heart." Mary's reaction to all the wonderful things that were happening to her, physically, emotionally and spiritually, was of quiet wonder and reflection - not overreaction. What a wonderful way that would be to respond to all the changes, fears and doubts we, too, see around ourselves. Mary was a young girl when the angel Gabriel spoke to her, some say even as young as fourteen years of age and yet, she was able to act in faith and trust. Mary, who broke out into a song ...*Continued in page 2*

GOD WITH US

(Reflection from TRACI Director)

The **incarnation of Jesus** is being celebrated by different people with diverse focus. Generally, for the world at large, it is one of religious celebrations and a very good opportunity to come together, make merry and make a good business out of it. It is no wonder then that the church also tends to do the same or falls into the trap of it. As we celebrate let's keep two broader messages in our mind and make our celebrations centred around them.

Incarnation of Jesus should **motivate us to worship God in ordinary, humble, difficult, painful and lonely situations**. It is a time when God became man and dwelt among us. He preferred a manger, preferred sinners, sick and the ordinary people and preferred the cross. As we experience the power and presence of the resurrected Jesus, we are **called to see Jesus among them and in such situations and worship him**. It is not of course in pomp and pleasure, not in palaces and palace like mansions, not in summer houses and winter houses, not in ivory towers and definitely not in gluttonous eating and drinking. Therefore, let our **celebrations of God's presence amidst us be true incarnational worship**.

As we commemorate the incarnation of Jesus, we should remind ourselves the **incarnational ministry** he has entrusted us. We are called to **continue the reconciling and healing ministry** to the broken in their situation as Jesus has done from manger to the cross because he dwells among us even now.

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of praise, was a woman who knew her scriptures well and could speak about the mission of the son who was to be born to her as one who would bring about justice and salvation for her people. Mary, who bore the Christ-child, had to be eventually willing to release her son to not just death, but the worst of deaths, the death of a criminal. As someone said, Mary, in becoming favoured, had to also be willing to accept ignominy as well as relinquish that which she loved. And Mary, in quiet confidence, pondered over these things.

Even as the year draws to a close and whatever may be our frame of mind, may we be reminded and encouraged by the enormity of that act in which God became man and the supreme and superior place that God has given us, His people. Let us also remember that like Mary we are privileged to be doing what God has called us to do, and whatever the circumstances, let us ponder deeply and act in faith despite the conflicts that engulf us.

Dr. Joy LK Pachuau (Professor of History, JNU, she is also a TRACI Board member)

TRACI ONLINE COURSE: INTEGRAL MISSION

TRACI launched its first online course on 20th September 2021 with the keynote address by Mr. L. T. Jeyachandran. The course duration was for 10 weeks with regular teaching session on every Tuesdays and special sessions with guest faculty on selected Fridays. We had 36 participants from different walks of life and from 6 countries (India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar & Philippines) of which there were 12 women and 16 overseas participants.

We believe that a proper understanding of the theology of mission, specifically Integral Mission is the key to equip the Christian community for Missional Living. Hence, the course content was prepared to provide the participants with strong Biblical foundations on Mission, insights and strands of missional underpinnings from the church history, Biblical ethical imperatives that demand social engagement of Christian community, and finally with a thrust on practical aspects of missional engagements in different areas of our life in this world.

Thought provoking questions, stimulating discussions in breakout rooms, and time for Q&A were some of the features of the sessions in this course. The regular teaching sessions were led by Mr. Mathew Varghese, Mr. Raaj Mondol, Dr. Bonnie Miriam Jacob, Ms. Priya S L and Mr. Sathish Joseph Simon. The special sessions (supplementary in nature) provided the participants an opportunity to learn from and to interact with eminent Christian leaders (Mr. C B Samuel, Rev. Dr. Jacob Thomas, Mr. Sanjiv Ailawadi, Rev. Sudarshan Thomas and Dr. Jamila Koshy). The course concluded on 30th November 2021 with the closing address by Dr. Saphir Athyal. We thank God for Mr. Issacc Thomas, who coordinated the training programme.

... GOD WITH US

Therefore it is **not the commemoration of the dead but of the one who dwells among us now** and in each of us. This reality should **radically shake us and take us to mangers, the sick, downtrodden, sinners, exploited, marginalized, discriminated, alienated and even to the cross for a transformative engagement.** The reason is the same; **God is with us - Immanuel.**

-Mr. Mathew Varghese, Director, TRACI

TRACI looks forward to your generous contribution to meet our rising needs. Our monthly budget is about ₹ 3,50,000/-. We are grateful to God for your gifts and appreciate your thoughtfulness.

DO LOOK FORWARD TO THE UPCOMING PROGRAMMES

- **January 29th 2022:** Reflection: Climate Change & Alternatives.
- **February 29th 2022:** Reflection: Gender Research by TRACI on Domestic Violence

TRACI MONTHLY REFLECTIONS

(November-December 2021)

Domestic Violence And The Church

On the occasion of the 'International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women,' TRACI held a session on the topic "Domestic Violence and the Church." Mr. Raaj Mondol facilitated the conversation with panelists Dr. Vandana Kanth, Dr. Jamila Koshy and Rev. Sunil Caleb. Over a 150 people attended the programme..

An insight from the ongoing TRACI research on gender violence and a real-time poll put into perspective the theme of the day. Dr. Koshy and Dr. Kanth touched upon a series of topics; the forms of violence, the conditions that bolster it and the phenomena of "silence" prevalent within the family and the community. Rev. Caleb was of the opinion that within the church conversations are direct consequence of the power dynamics. The questions and insights from the participants facilitated further discussions and details to the theme. The conversation considered possible forms of remedies and preventive steps to equip the Christian community and the church at large to work towards eliminating gender-based forms of violence.

Practice of Religion Under the Constitution

The December TRACI Reflection focusing on the theme "The Practice of Religion Under the Constitution" was facilitated by Adv. Jayakrishnan D. and Adv. Febin Mathew Varghese, two practicing lawyers. They covered the constitutional provisions of practicing religion in India and the various nuances of how to understand them.

The visionary nature and intentionality of the Indian constitution stood out even as Adv. Febin examined the various judgments that have been pronounced in the various courts over the years surrounding the practice of religion. The conversation also highlighted the infringement on the rights of the minorities and the politics that surrounds passing of the anti-conversion bills by the various states. Adv. Jayakrishnan was of the opinion that the essential character of the Indian Constitution will not be compromised despite the onslaught on the practice of religion considering India's position on the world stage. The conversation also urged the church to introspect its concerns and preoccupations and also be voice for rights of all who are marginalized and persecuted despite their religious persuasion.

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