

Catholic Review
12.23.87
P. A1

The divine gift of Christmas

The three great figures of the Advent and Christmas season are also symbolic of our three steps in salvation history.

That is, the three major steps in the virtue of hope: The covenant relationship of a chosen people, the individual conversion of each person conforming to the will of God, and a certainty that we, each of us, are called and invited to share in the life of God.

The three great figures in this Advent and Christmas season then are the prophet Isaiah, St. John the Baptist and Our Lady, the virgin mother of God. All express the hope that every person born in the world has the invitation and potential of one day knowing God as he is and being united with him in eternal happiness.

Isaiiah, speaking to people who were losing hope because of oppression and enslavement by strong pagan nations, was inspired by God to proclaim that the covenant relationship of the Jewish people could not be destroyed by temporal powers. He proclaimed that the Messiah would come and God would intervene in human history even to the extent of the Messiah being conceived and born of a virgin.

Therefore, the Hebrew people would continue to be the people of promise.

St. John the Baptist, the blood cousin of Jesus and spiritual cousin by grace, made a challenge of a different nature. He called on individuals to recognize the personal disorder in their lives and to be converted and open to the immediate coming of the Messiah whom John was later to understand was Christ the Lord.

The hope that John the Baptist offered recognized the freedom and the loving potential that every person born in the order of time, but destined for the order of eternity, has.

Our Lady portrays and symbolizes the virtue of hope that becomes a certainty because of her complete willingness to conform perfectly to the will of God. She thus exemplifies the ultimate gift of God, that is, perfect union with him.

At Christmas we commemorate and celebrate the reality of the love of God taking on our human nature and living with us in our limited condition. We unconsciously think that Our Lady's greatest gift was being the mother of Jesus. But really her greatest gift was sharing in the divine life of her son. More than any other person on earth, she was, as the poet described her, 'nature's solitary boast.'

So what is our hope for Christmas?

I say hope rather than hopes because the greatest of gift Jesus, who is the Christ, is that he shares his divine life with us. In truly accepting his redemptive love, we literally can think and direct our life with a power, security and happiness that is divine.

May God's blessing be upon you this holy season and Merry Christmas.