



ILLINOIS Focus

Editorial



JOHN GRYS,
PRESIDENT

During this time of year, I find special comfort from the story of the birth of the Baby. The mixed emotions born out in Matthew's account in chapter 2 captures the deeper sentiments of life in this world. The first part of two captures the arrival of the Magi from the east while the next part captures the death of the innocent. The combination of both a promise arrived and the death of thousands of promises presents our human dilemma. How can joy abide while innocence is slain?

If I am honest, I wish the writer had just told the chirpy, joyful, triumphant account of the Child being born in the midst of a politically charged world. I wish the central focus would've been on the Magi and their strong interest in this hidden child. I wish more time would've been spent on those Magi arriving and what they said to mom and dad. I would've loved to hear how that journey to the Child shaped their journey (now pilgrimage?) back to their homeland. What did they say when they arrived back home? How were they received? What impact did their journey make on the journeys of so many others? This inquiring mind wants to know.

Instead, I get a follow up story and it is not pleasant. While the Promise had been born and worshipped by disciples from the east, we find the tragic and brutal account of more children being slain. The injustice of such brutality upon innocent children due to political fear seems to lessen the Power of the Promise. The King is born and people die. Not a very pleasant Hallmark film or Christmas Card. The sinister nature of humanity finds expression at the birth of the Promise.

humanity? In the midst of humanity's horrific depravity would always be present this divine grace wrapped in a blanket?

As I reflect on this full-on story of the Divine Christ Child, I am so comforted by the record left for us. It does not paint a rosy picture of humanity, His people, and the powers of the day. And yet, the rising of the Son through the mist and fog of uncertainty reminds me amidst the fog, mist, and uncertainty of

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Issue Focus

Christmas

And yet...yet, it is precisely this juxtaposition of these two narratives (Matthew 2:1-12; Matthew 2:13-18) which bring such paradoxical hope. The Promise arrived under less-than-ideal conditions. Politics and violence and military intrigue filled the banners of the day. And despite all this, God would not be dissuaded. The treachery of mankind would not stall the vital action of God. He plants through the birth His "already" kingdom. I wonder if the biblical writer knew that in all the ensuing ages, there would be this tension between the present kingdom of heaven and the treacherous soul of

our day that God has not abandoned nor forgotten. He continues to make ways now as He did then. He may not eradicate all the darkness but He does know that with even a small light, the Son would emerge to conquer the darkness and bring us to the eternal dawn.

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MERRY & BRIGHT

Joy for today, hope for tomorrow.



One of my favorite Christmas songs is “White Christmas”, penned by Irving Berlin but made popular by Bing Crosby. This classic tune is teeming with a whimsical and airy ambience, leaving you to daydream about holidays past and the memories that bring a smile to your soul. I’m sure you know it. It’s the one that goes, “May your days be merry and bright”. . .

Well, I lost my dad when I was eight years old, but this was the song he’d play every December on his old-school record player. It was one of his favorites. I never forgot that. After a few years had passed, I found myself feeling a bit guilty during the holidays. I was sad because my dad was no longer there to curl up next to and sift through old Christmas records with, but I was also happy because I knew someday I’d be able to make memories with him again. How could I feel both emotions at the same time?

Fast forward many years and I’m pretty sure I’ve found the answer, and it’s actually pretty simple. I believe that the birth of Jesus brings us both joy for today and hope for tomorrow. For those of us who feel the weight of the holidays, Jesus brings us the hope of being reunited with those we’ve lost. And for those of us looking to spread some cheer around, Jesus brings us the joy of salvation in Him.

So this Christmas, no matter where you find yourself, I pray that your days be merry and bright...full of joy for today, and hope for tomorrow.

STACEY DEPLUZER,
ASSOCIATE YOUTH DIRECTOR



Felices Fiestas Misioneras

An que todos sabemos que Jesús no nació en diciembre y que probablemente diciembre haya sido una fecha para complacer a paganos, la navidad es siempre una gran oportunidad para el evangelio de la Gracia.

Po décadas la Iglesia Adventista hace uso de fechas que no tienen mucho que ver con nuestra fe para predicar. Navidad, Semana Santa, Día de los muertos, Día de padres y Madres. La fecha es casi interminable.

Todos los años me llegan las mismas quejas de que ¿porqué hablamos de navidad? o de ¿porqué celebramos la navidad? Para muchos hermanos y hermanas sinceros y fieles a Dios, la fecha de Diciembre llega a ser un incómodo sin tamaño.

Lo que valdría la pena entender es que la navidad es una fecha que no va a desaparecer y que el mundo ni las iglesias dejaran de reconocerlas. Si es así, ¿qué podríamos hacer con una fecha que levanta tantas dudas y preocupaciones?

Al llegar otra navidad a nuestras vidas quisiera en estas líneas darle algunas sugerencias para el uso de

esta fecha teniendo siempre en mente que la predicación del evangelio está por encima de todas las cosas.

1 Usa la puerta abierta – La navidad es una fecha celebrada en todo hemisferio occidental del planeta tierra. Miles de millones de personas que no le hacen caso a Cristo durante todo el año se recuerdan del Salvador en esta fecha. Como seguidores de Cristo y predicadores de su palabra deberíamos aprovechar esta oportunidad para llevar un poco de esperanza y paz a estos corazones que, en la navidad se acuerdan de Cristo. Un regalo, un libro, unas galletas o algo sencillo con un mensaje de esperanza puede ser la puerta de entrada en el corazón de muchos.

2 Un regalo de amor – Como sería bueno si todas nuestras iglesias usaran esta fecha para promover una ofrenda de amor. Es cierto que no necesitamos la navidad para hacer eso. Podemos pedir una ofrenda de amor todos los sábados, todos los días. Si es así ¿porqué hacerlo en la navidad? Esa ofrenda no es para los miembros de la Iglesia y si una oportunidad de pedirle a los que no están en Cristo una ofrenda especial. Con ese dinero podríamos ayudar a muchos niños en necesidad o mismo atender necesidades de la Iglesia.

3 Fecha en Familia – Lo ideal de una familia Cristiana debería ser estar en paz durante todos los días del año. Ese debería ser el ideal. ¿Es esa nuestra realidad? ¿Como está la paz y tranquilidad de nuestro hogar? ¿Porque no aprovechar que todas las familias están juntas para unirnos como familia y disfrutar una cena especial? El gran regalo que se pudiera dar esa noche sería el pedir perdón y perdonar, recomenzar.

RUBEN BULLON,
HISPANIC MINISTRIES DIRECTOR &
ASSOCIATE MINISTERIAL DIRECTOR





LAURA LUCIO
PEORIA SDA CHURCH

I

Does the Advent season have room for me?

At one point, Luke tells us that “Mary kept all these things in her heart and pondered them often.” I feel the same way about the Advent season. Every Christmas hymn reminds us to be joyful. The sugary Christmas movies nudge us to be jolly. But, for millions of people, including myself, Advent is also a time to remember lost lives and loved ones. So I ponder - *does the narrative of Jesus’ birth have room for us? Can we sing “Tearful, Tearful, We Adore Thee”?*

Naturally, Advent focuses on Mary, Joseph, and the birth of Jesus. But Matthew’s gospel reminds us that the story of Jesus’ birth has a dark side:

*“A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”*

~ Matthew 2:18

The good news of Jesus was quickly followed by the bad news of Herod, who set out to massacre the baby boys of Bethlehem in a futile attempt to kill Jesus. Those mothers may have had no idea why they were made to suffer.

A silent night? Hardly.

The Boy Who Lived

II

In the midst of the joy of God incarnate, there’s sadness; an utter, needless, tragic, gruesome loss. I invite you to imagine “*Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted...*” I can see her beyond her limits, bleeding tears as she rocks empty arms. I imagine these mothers crawling on the bare dirt, wailing and mourning the bloodbath. I can feel and breathe the air of despair.

Though there was no room at the inn, how many would have rather had a baby in a manger than no baby at all?

Like frankincense and myrrh, grief has a familiar scent; we all wail “why, God?” sooner or later in our lives. Pain is so prevalent, yet we seldom acknowledge the darkness we experience. It is hard to be still when we witness or experience pain. To be fair, we weren’t created to know pain like this. It is a gift that our mind, body, and soul adapted to survive it.


III

Maybe God called Matthew to record this story in the middle of His Son’s birth to honor their pain. Satan has ever sought to seed in bad news with the good; the wheat and tares grow together. Life and death, light and darkness in this way just a few verses apart. Matthew was intentional not to look away. It had to be that God knew and felt grief with these mothers and joy with Mary. Isn’t He the God of those who gained, as well as those who lost?

God made space for “weeping and wailing” in the midst of the Advent season. So why not “refuse to be comforted” and allow ourselves to grieve? We can exist in joy as we exist in grief and instead of “I shouldn’t feel this way” we can say “it’s okay not to be okay right now.” I hope we choose not to suppress parts of us this season, but hold space for all of it in grace.

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“Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. **For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.** And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Matthew 1:20-21

Risky Business

Whether you're looking on Tik Tok, IG, or Facebook, you can find a parody of Joseph's reaction to Mary telling him she was pregnant. And each of them end with the same result. . . Joseph making a point that Mary's story didn't quite make sense. But you know what? Joseph's story often plays second fiddle to Mary's. While he may not be the main character in this narrative, we can learn a lot from the way in which he goes about handling the situation.

To be fair, the current scenario Mary has just brought him into impacts both of their reputations, yet he doesn't publicly shame her. Matthew 1:19 reminds us that he actually made plans to divorce her quietly- an attempt to shield them both from scandal. He loved Mary and wanted to protect her. Still yet, this was not how he expected his life to go. It was not his plan.

But then, in a dream, an angel tells him to step out on faith and take Mary as his wife. What?! But she's still pregnant? Yep. And it's still not his kid? Mhmm. And it will impact his reputation? Yeah. Sounds stressful.

BUT! The angel also tells Joseph not to be afraid, because the child that Mary is carrying is Holy. And so Joseph does as he's told. But what does he get out of this?

Because Joseph chose love and compassion over fear, he got to be a part of the most beautiful story ever told. Rather than being the guy who ditched Mary in favor of his reputation, he was Joseph, father to Jesus Christ. He got to be the man who loved the woman who carried the Savior of the world in her womb. Not the main character, but a major supporting role. His life was changed forever because he took a risk and followed God's leading rather than leaning on his own understanding.

Is there a place that you are resisting following God because you're worried about how it might affect your reputation? Or maybe because you're worried your life won't look the way you thought it would?

This Christmas, we invite you to step out on faith and ask the Lord to give you the courage to say yes to wherever He leads. It's a journey worth taking. . . just ask Joseph!



WELCOME TO OUR TEAM



Tiffany Salgado

Behavioral Intervention Specialist

I am originally from the Midwest area, but the last couple of years my family has been traveling around since my husband was in the U.S. Army. First, we lived in Texas for a few years and then the last two years we lived in South Korea. We just returned to the states this summer. We have a 4 year old girl, Carolina (Lena), and a 1 year old boy, Alexander. My son was actually born in South Korea while we were stationed there. During this time, I earned my Bachelor's degree in Psychology, minoring in Family Systems, my Master's degree in Psychology, specializing in Applied Behavior Analysis, and now currently studying for a PsyD in School Psychology. During our time in South Korea, I was a stay-at-home mom to my two little ones, but before this I worked as a Registered Behavioral Technician at an Autism Clinic where I worked in clinic, home, and school settings.

I am working as the Illinois Conference Behavioral Intervention Specialist, and I am very excited to work with the Illinois Conference and their schools. I hope God can use my education and background to help our students thrive in our schools.

WELCOME TO OUR TEAM



Claudya Barrientos

Conference Clerk and Assistant to Youth Department

I've been blessed to be working with the Illinois Conference these past few months as the new Conference Clerk and the Assistant to the Youth Department. I was born in Washington, DC and raised in Maryland, though my parents are from El Salvador. I graduated from Columbia Union College, now known as Washington Adventist University, with an undergraduate degree in Business Administration and later with a Masters in Business Administration. My graduate studies continued at Andrews University where I earned an M.A. in Youth & Young Adult Ministries. I've had the honor of serving as a Conference Clerk for the past 10 years, as well the privilege of serving across different ministries and departments within various church institutions.

My greatest accomplishment and most beautiful gifts are my two wonderful daughters, Emma and Abby, that I have with my amazing husband, Josant. It is our honor and pleasure to work together as a family to further God's ministry by serving the people He loves.

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The Father intervened, Jesus escaped as an immigrant.

The Baby lived and one day will avenge the merciless crimes and gratuitous tragedies. In the end, Jesus chose to “*drink from the cup of suffering*” (Matthew 20:23) and die, not at the hands of Herod, but so that we might live abundantly. And that death was also not the end. At the cross and resurrection we see pain and joy mingling yet again. But death could not hold Him. He has overcome and, soon enough, Jesus will cup our faces in His pierced hands and hold us until our tear-stained cheeks radiate healing. What a gift! May you be comforted with every breath this season. By His love, you and I are worthy of His gift.

A holy night, where joy and pain exist? Definitely.

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Todo en esta vida puede ser una oportunidad para hacer algo por Cristo. No permitas que en este diciembre tus preocupaciones sean más grandes que tu deseo de salvar personas para el reino de Dios. No te detengas porque no te gusta una fecha o porque sientes que es tu deber mostrar su supuesto paganismo. Mira esta navidad como una oportunidad de salvar y alcanzar almas para el reino. Si miras la vida desde esa perspectiva seguramente lograrás cumplir mejor con la sagrada misión que Dios nos dio a todos nosotros.

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