

Mission Letter

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA (WHITE FATHERS)

November 2015

Dear friends of the Missions,

Once again comes that marvelous time of Christmas. We, Missionaries of Africa, want to wish you a wonderful, merry Christmas. Peace be upon each of you, let happiness shine all round you. Thank you for your loving prayer and help. It is always a pleasure to hear from you, to read your messages, to listen to your voice on the phone, to welcome you in our hearts. In this time of celebrations, we ask God to bless you and be very near the sick and lonely persons.

Our Canadian winter, unknown to the majority of the African peoples, knocks at the door. With the family rituals, the lights, the gifts, it is a kind of enchanting vision that is offered to us. The scenery carries a message of peace, harmony, happiness and communion. One hopes that the divisions, the vexations, and the difficulties of our daily life will come to an end, and become springboards for better days.

In the midst of our life, suddenly and unexpectedly, a message springs up and reaches to our hearts: "It happened that, while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have a child. She gave birth to a son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger" (Luke 2, 6-7). An angel told the terrified shepherds: "Do not be afraid. I bring you news of great joy, to be shared by the whole people: Today a Saviour has been born to you, Christ the Lord. A sign is given to you: a baby wrapped in swaddling



clothes and lying in a manger". To swaddle means to wrap in long, narrow bands of cloth, as many people used to do in former times.

Jesus is the Invisible God who became visible to us. He is God with us: Emmanuel. "The Word became flesh and lived among us", as saint John says in his gospel (1, 14).

Questions come to my missionary heart: do I see and recognize Jesus in the life of the persons I meet, or is there some kind of swaddling clothes in my heart that prevent me from recognizing him? Does my behaviour show Jesus or hide him? Are all our Christmas festivities, gifts, decorations, and flashing lights swaddling the new-born Jesus, the Loving Jesus in one's life? Are our doctrine and our right-minded moral conduct and sayings swaddling the Saviour, in such a way that the Invisible God cannot be visible? Is our Christmas tree guiding to Jesus? Are our Christmas cribs at home, in the churches, in public squares leading to Jesus? This wrapping Jesus the gospel speaks of reminds me of our missionary responsibility: Jesus, the gift God the Father gives us, has to be unwrapped if we want to see the Invisible God who became a little baby in our world. And then we will sing: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favours". The Invisible God is lying in your life, in the life of your close relatives, in the life of your neighbours, Christians or not. He is a little baby whose silence and love speak louder than all our human words.

I worked in Burkina Faso for 15 years. I share with you an unforeseen missionary openness among Muslim children. Christian children used to make small clay cribs at the entrance of their house. Muslim children also wanted to do the same. I once saw and overheard Christian children explaining to their Muslim friends the meaning of the crib and of each of the figures: "the small baby is Jesus, the Son of God who became man". That was completely out of the understanding of the Muslims. But, the message was passed on. A missionary, each of you and I, is a loving presence of God to all those he meets. And everybody can pass on the message that lies behind the crib.

These words relate you to us, Missionaries of Africa. Thank you for your loving prayer and help. It is always a pleasure to hear from you, to read your messages, to listen to your voice on the phone, to welcome you in our hearts. In this time of celebrations, we ask God to bless you and be very near the sick and lonely persons. May you enjoy a wonderful, merry Christmas. Peace be upon each of you, let happiness shine all round you.

Fr Gilles Barrette, M. Afr.



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Provincial of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers)