

Mission Letter

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

December 2017

Dear Friends and Benefactors of the Missionaries of Africa,

The Missionaries of Africa are Christian believers. The heart of our faith is that Jesus, the beloved Son of God, was made flesh, lived his human life, and was arrested, crucified, died, but He rose from the dead. The Resurrection of Jesus is the key-word for the understanding of our Christian faith. At Easter, we celebrate the core of our faith. From that central belief, other feasts came to be celebrated. During our Christmas season, there is the feast of the Epiphany, which means the manifestation of Christ, the risen Lord, to the nations. Let us have a look at what the Christian Scriptures say: "some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage'" (Matthew 2, 2). And further, we read: "they set out. There in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was (.....). Going into the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold, and frank incense and myrrh" (Mat 2, 9-11). Were these wise men kings? We don't know. But they probably were God's seekers. Or, at least, they were looking for a meaningful life. Very early our Christian tradition came to see in these wise men important people representing the wholeness of the earth. The evangelist Matthew says that Jesus, after his resurrection, appeared to his apostles and told them: "Go, make disciples of all nations" (Mat 28, 19). The feast of the Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of Christ to the nations. Our Christian brothers and sisters in the East pray with the help of wonderful icons. One of them shows Jesus in a manger where Mary laid her son, the manger looks like an opened grave, the new-born child is wrapped in swaddling clothes, he is about to raise up out of the grave. Birth and resurrection of Jesus go together.



Christmas and Epiphany: two celebrations for the same mystery of the birth of Jesus, the risen Lord and Saviour of all women and men. When a Christian reads the Scriptures, his faith has in mind the Risen Lord. The three wise men gave homage to the Son of God who became flesh, lived a human life, did marvels, was crucified, died and was risen from the dead. The Gospel witnesses to Jesus, the one who rose from the dead and is proclaimed Christ our Saviour. "God so much loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life (John 3, 16).

To look for a meaningful life: what does it mean to me? So many women and men seem to be without any goal in life, or suffer from a lack of dignity. The wise men strove towards a goal, and followed the star which guided them to Jesus. Thus they felt fulfilled. Opening their treasures, they offered him gifts. "When did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or naked, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?"... In so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you neglected to do it to me (Mat 25, 44-45)".

Therefore, what can be our "Christmas wishes", for our relatives, friends, neighbours, and for our world. They should not be only words which will remain unaccomplished. Words must become actions. Compassion, peace, love, forgiveness, mercy, etc. In 2018, the Missionaries of Africa will be celebrating the 150th jubilee of their foundation: they thank the Lord for what has been achieved, Jesus and the Africans are still their passionate love, and they look forward to the years to come, because much is still to be done, and very often by the Africans who are bettering Africa. We nevertheless still see poor health services, a low schooling rate, corruption, political bad governance, rapes, tribal or religious wars, widows left alone without any help, lack of water and food, a growing number of displaced people obliged to run away from their homes and lands, becoming migrants, looking for a better life for themselves and their children. Words must become actions. These situations are to be fought against with the means of love, patience. As Saint Paul says: "Stand your ground, with truth a belt round your waist, and uprightness a breastplate, wearing for shoes on your feet the eagerness to spread the gospel of peace, and always carrying the shield of faith so that you can use it to quench the burning arrows of the evil one. You must take salvation as your helmet and the sword of the Spirit, that is, the Word of God." (Ephes 6, 14-17).

You who read this message are much richer than any king of the world. Each individual person can open his treasures, and choose something to offer to the new-born child. What therefore it is that you offer? Look at the rising star and follow it: it might guide you to persons whose needs knock at your door. Open your heart and out of your treasures, choose the gift that you're going to offer. Offer your ears to listen to whoever wants to be listened to. Offer your time to whoever goes through a special difficulty. Offer time and presence to your child or grand-child, or a sick person. Say 'hello' to a beggar, offer him a smile, and give him a penny. It will not be reported in the news, but your heart will feel fulfilled.

Dear friends, we pray that this coming Christmas season be a blessing for each of you and your beloved ones. May Jesus the new born be with you throughout the year and give you from the abundance of His love. We, Missionaries of Africa, pray for you, especially for those among you who go through tough times or hardly carry heavy daily burdens. We pray for the sick and rejoice with those who rejoice.



Gilles Barrette, M.Afr.