

## **CHRISTMAS REVEALS GOD'S LOVE**

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'The Greatest Story Ever Told' is a famous hollywood film based on the book of the same name written by Fulton Oursler. The screenplay of the film is written by James Lee Barrett and George Stevens. The later is also the Director of the film. The Max von Sydow is hero of the film who got international acclaim for playing the part of Jesus.

"The Greatest Story Ever Told" tells the story of Jesus, the Son of God, who was born at Bethlehem in Judea 2000 years ago. The film produced in 1965 became an instant success with 5 Academy Nominations and other awards.

The story lines of the film, which one feels tempted to see again and again, are well known. In the Gospel Mathew tells the story of the Son of God, Jesus being born at Bethlehem. The king Herod Antipas and the whole Jerusalem got upset and frightened on hearing the news.

Herod got the news of the birth of the king of the Jews from the visitors – Magi kings - from the East. Herod became furious when he realized that the Magi kings did not return to him after discovering and worshipping the new born king of Jews, Jesus. So he ordered the killing of all boys in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood who were two years old or younger.

The Roman history shows that King Herod did not live long after he had killed the innocent children. His son Archelaus succeeded his father.

According to 'The Greatest Story Ever Told', Archelaus ruled Judea with a heavy hand. So the Roman Emperor decided to keep Archelaus on a tight rope. So a centurion was sent to Archelaus to give the news of the Emperor's displeasure about his misruling.

The centurion reached the palace of Archelaus. While they were talking the centurion heard the earnest pleading of the Jewish people in the closeby Temple in prayer for a Saviour who would liberate them.

"Which liberating Saviour are the Jews praying for?" The centurion asked King Archelaus.

"They are praying for a liberating Saviour who will never come", Archelaus replied immediately. But the Jewish people for centuries were praying for a Saviour who would liberate them from all types of bondage and they were making all preparations to receive the Saviour. But among these believing Jews there were also people like king Archelaus who never believed in the coming of the Saviour.

Archelaus must have believed that his father, King Herod Antipas must have killed if ever a Saviour was born when he ordered the killing all boys of two years old and below at Bethlehem and its neighbourhood. But King Archelaus and all like him were proved wrong.

The Christians believe that in the fullness of time according to God's plan Jesus, the Son of God was born at Bethlehem. He was the one for whom the whole humankind waited as the Saviour to

come. In the words of John, “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life” (John 3, 16).

When Jesus was born, there was great rejoicing in the whole universe even as there were people like King Archelaus who refused to believe it. As narrated by Luke in his Gospel the pregnant Mary with her husband Joseph went to Bethlehem, the city of David as Joseph was a descendant of King David wanting to register their names in the census ordered by Emperor Augustus. “While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger – there was no room for them to stay in the inn” (Luke 2, 6-7).

When Jesus was born at Bethlehem there were shepherds watching their sheep at night in the open field. Suddenly an angel appeared before the shepherds and said, “Don’t be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David’s town your Saviour was born - Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger” (Lk 2, 10-12).

With the scene of the manger at Bethlehem Luke has also depicted another scene in the sky. With the angel who gave the message of great joy to the shepherds, there appeared many angels. Luke writes, “Suddenly a great army of heaven’s angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!” (Lk 2, 13-14).

Today after 2000 years after the birth of Jesus the Christian world celebrates Christmas joining the angels and the shepherds, the least ones of the societies in praising God for the marvels of the Son of God being born as a human being! During this season the Christians every where are trying to fathom the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God as a human person as they kneel in front of Jesus in the crib, which they have made in their homes and Churches. In fathoming the mystery, questions may arise in their hearts “What is the secret of you, Jesus in being born as a man?” and “Jesus, what is your message for me today as you lie in the manger?”

We may find clear answers to these two questions from a scene in the ‘The Greatest Story Ever Told’. Jesus has chosen as his disciples – apostles – Simon Peter, his brother Andrew and John. All three are ordinary fisher men. As Jesus walks with the three disciples they have to pass the toll naka of the tax collector Mathew. Mathew asks the disciples, “Does your Master has anything to declare?”

The disciples inform the tax collector that indeed their Master has much to declare.

Mathew is delighted that Jesus has much to declare as he expects much tax from Jesus and he asks them the details of things to be declared.

“Our master has an abundance of love for you to declare,” the disciples said. Mathew cannot believe his ears that Jesus has an abundance of love for him! The Jews people despised him for

serving the Romans as a tax collector and they considered him a sinner and the enemy of the Jewish people! But here is Jesus, the great Master declaring an abundance of love in stead of despising him!

Mathew instantly leaves his lucrative business of tax collecting and follows Jesus as his disciple.

Yes. The Christians believe that God the Father loves each and everyone of us and the entire humanity. And Jesus has taken the human form as one among us to reveal that great, unconditional love of God for you and me and the entire humanity. So the Baby Jesus in the manger reveals God's unconditional love.

Now the basic question is do we recognize the unconditional love of God for men and women? And how do you and I respond to that unconditional love? These are the question Jesus asks you and me lying in the manger. (contact the author: [ciss@satyam.net.in](mailto:ciss@satyam.net.in))

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