

A Message of Hope to the St. Anthony's Parish, the  
Have - Nots - and to the Haves. 27 Nov. 63.  
Luke 2 vs. 1-7, 8-14.

Luke 2 vs. 11 & 12: "Today in the city of David a deliverer has been born to you - the Messiah, the Lord. And this is your sign: you will find a baby lying wrapped in his swaddling clothes in a manger"

The birth of Jesus in a stable on the outskirts of Bethlehem, the historical city of David, has throughout the centuries been exploited to present a falsely romantic picture of the birth of the long awaited Messiah. The exciting and exceptional circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth have many times been so overemphasized that Christian believers have been tempted to ignore or to underestimate one fact of great significance namely that this child Jesus was born in great <sup>simplicity, even</sup> poverty and that his whole life - from his birth to his death - would reflect this situation of simplicity.

- He was born as the child of humble peasants - Joseph a carpenter and Mary a housewife.

- ~~Now~~ The inability of Joseph to find another abode when, coming to the stables, the small boarding house was filled to capacity, must also partly be contributed to the fact that

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he didn't have adequate means to afford anything expensive or luxurious

- As far as we know Jesus never owned or acquired any property or material goods
- His views on the issue of wealth and poverty were expressed in numerous pronouncements & parables and although the poor around him found these ideas very comforting there were many, especially amongst the well-to-do and the wealthy, who were angry and upset
- When he died his garment, a gift of love, was all that the soldiers could lay hands on
- In the moment of his dying agony on the cross he entrusted his mother to the care of his disciple John knowing full well that the lack of an estate or financial means would make no difference to John's loving care of Mary.

all this does not imply that Jesus wanted to proclaim that poverty per se is a virtue or that material possessions or wealth is a sin but it does convey a number of very significant facts regarding Jesus' attitude to riches & wealth <sup>and to convey very, ~~clearly~~ <sup>convincingly</sup></sup> which we as Christians

1. His situation of poverty at birth would become a reflection of his whole future life - a life to be lived <sup>voluntarily</sup> in simplicity & poverty



poverty. The circumstances of his birth he <sup>converted into</sup> ~~made~~ a deliberate choice of his life in identifying with the poor, the dispossessed, the hungry, the maimed, the ill, the people who had <sup>or little</sup> no status or influence in society 13

2. This voluntary poverty and his constant sharing of material goods with those in need, has to be seen as an expression of his love and concern for his fellow-men

3. His constant warnings of the temptation and the danger of riches, of wealth and of excessive material goods should ~~be~~ be seen and understood not as a denunciation and rejection of the rich and the wealthy but as an expression of his love and concern for the rich and the wealthy.

4. His many pronouncements, his constantly recurring references to the rich and the poor force us to focus our attention on one of the central and very important issues in human society and human relations namely the issue of the haves and the have-nots - or should I rather say the haves-too-many and the haves-too-little. In many countries throughout the world it has grown into a situation

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of tension and even serious conflict between the haves and the have-nots - the fear of the haves that they may lose their material privilege and wealth and the desires which wealth offers, versus the growing insistence of the have-nots that they have <sup>an equal</sup> right to the vast resources of wealth and production.

5. [The last point] In the same night when Jesus was born in a stable a host of angels conveyed an overwhelming message of joy and hope to a group of humble peasants keeping watch over their flocks of sheep, announcing the appearance of the Deliverer, the long-awaited Messiah, the Lord. This is the sign: a baby in the manger born in the most humble circumstances - God's gift of love to all men, the visible sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. This Jesus would come to meet the needs of all men, including their material needs to solve the problem of material injustice, of centralising human greed whilst at the same time providing for man's essential need. The world in general is not interested to solve this problem (we are all too busy with

our own individual material <sup>wants</sup> ~~needs~~ 5.  
and demands). The church (or part  
of it) has tried to tackle this  
issue up till now with little  
success. One thing is certain: who-  
ever wishes to find the solution  
must be willing to start at the  
stable in Bethlehem, to look for  
the sign in the manger, the Deborah  
who is the Messiah, the Lord.