



ASSEMBLIES of GOD
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

Prez Release



An eNewsletter to AGTS Friends

December 2007

Day of Renewal Thursday, January 24

9:30 a.m.

1:30 p.m.

6:30 p.m.

CST

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Have a Holly Jolly Christmas!

The clanging of the Salvation Army bell outside busy stores has been matched by the sound of gunshots ringing out in mega-churches this Christmas season. Instead of missionary offerings, we have missionary centers under attack: not from anti-Christian elements, but a disgruntled participant. The bad attitude and miserly values of Ebenezer Scrooge look a bit tame next to the “sins” gaining the head-lines this year. To add insult to injury, more Christmas “cheer” has come in the form of George Mitchell’s report on steroids in Major League Baseball (MLB). As I scan foxsports.com and read the report on this unfolding tragedy, I fully expect there to be some type of subliminal background music with Simon and Garfunkel crooning, “Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio? Our nation turns our lonely eyes to you. Wu wu wu!!!”

In a very real sense, not much has changed since that first Christmas. Our tendency to domesticate the essence of Christ’s birth keeps us from acknowledging the chaos that existed 2000 years ago. The place that Jesus was born had the ambience of a cattle barn, a 24-hour truck stop, an all night liquor store and motel where you pay by the hour. In that less than inviting atmosphere, two poor and marginalized parents (to be) had little option but to begin their family in a setting where they were lucky to make it through the night, let alone give birth to a child!

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The Prez Release is a monthly commentary from the President of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. If you want to be removed from this mailing list or would like to update your email address, please contact sstarkey@agts.edu.

The violence that has shocked us, the last few days, parallels Herod's attempt to "erase" political threats. He unleashed a noisy intrusion into defenseless homes and sent his soldiers to kill all little boys less than two years of age in the region. We live in a violent world, a violent state and county, yet Herod and Bethlehem, 2000 years ago, leave us breathless as we consider the parents who watched their little sons crushed at the whim of a paranoid dictator. Countless parents watched as their sons, "their gifts from God", were destroyed before their very eyes. I shutter at the tragedy. They, too, expected to spend days and evenings with their sons, doing whatever that ancient culture deemed as appropriate for parents and their sons to enjoy relationally. Like the folks at the Youth With a Mission center near Denver and the New Life Church in Colorado Springs, they had a different expectation as they went about the routine of the day. Tragedy intruded suddenly and violently, leaving an indelible imprint of loss that finds no lasting compensation. To see your own child annihilated or your friend cut down in a house of worship before your own eyes: what parent, what faithful worshipper, can breathe freely after such tragedy?

Just as the hopes of Mary or Joseph seemed to have little chance of surviving the injustice adjudicated by Herod's minions, so the MLB investigation of steroid usage adds to our culture's growing cynicism about those in the lime-light who seem to be addicted more to self-advancement than nostalgia and the far-fetched idea of love for the national pastime. One can almost hear the 60's crooner, Peggy Lee, foisting her cynicism on us again, "If that's all there is...then let's keep dancin'...let's break out the booze and have a ball!"

It's Christmas and the tragedies in Denver and Colorado Springs will yield seasonal homilies that refer to these occurrences with various rhetorical attempts at making sense out of it all. Additional comments on the MLB disclosures will shatter the idyllic spirit that all too often fills this season, whether a person spends the "holiday season" with faith or not.

I must admit that all of the above hits me like a ton of bricks. I have many friends and colleagues in the Youth With a Mission. The recent tragedies at New Life Church, both failed leadership and the recent violence, take my breath away. As a passionate lifelong baseball fan whose idea of heaven on earth is a day game at Wrigley Field; it's like peanuts I just bought are empty shells.

Advent season is about anticipation—the coming of long-expected divine intervention by a redemptive God who enters His creation in such unobtrusive ways and with such stunning significance. The announcement of Jesus’ birth occurs among shepherds; they are their culture’s object for bad jokes. Shepherds are so mistrusted, they aren’t even allowed to testify in court, yet the announcement of the birth of Jesus is first given to them. The angels’ announcement is to “all people” and God starts with the lowest rung on the social ladder.

Frankly, that is a clear insight into what this season is all about. Human tragedy is an inevitability in this world we live in. Humans seem to have incredible creativity in destructive actions. It is in the middle of a world gripped by Caesar’s retributive tax code, Herod’s political paranoia and a middle of the night escape to Egypt for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus that God’s brightest redemptive character shines. I simply don’t think that two millennia of Christmases has distanced us from the clear and obvious message that hope shines brightest in darkness—the persistent darkness doesn’t hinder the good news to all people! So, as we contemplate the havoc brought on the YWAM center and the violence foisted on New Life Church, the darkness of night is still split by the hope heralded by angels—Good News to all people—and that includes the Chicago Cubs!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.



BYRON D. KLAUS

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