

Sean Goldman, the unyielding parent on Christmas Eve

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 Thursday, 24 December 2009
 Last Updated Thursday, 24 December 2009

Christmas Eve

Isaiah 9:2-7

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14(15-20)

Psalm 96 for the readings [click here](#)

A bitter legal battle has just finished over the custody of a nine-year-old Sean Goldman in Brazil. The custody battle began in 2004, when Goldman's wife, Bruna Bianchi, took Sean, who was then 4, from their home in New Jersey to Rio de Janeiro for what was to have been a two-week vacation. She never returned, instead remarrying there and retaining custody of Sean. She died last year in childbirth. Economics apparently had played a role, since U.S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-New Jersey, had placed a hold on a trade bill that would have benefited Brazil to the tune of \$2.75 billion. Lautenberg's hold was designed to exert additional pressure on Brazilian authorities to abide by the court order to return Sean to his father, he said.

The story of Sean Goldman is the story of an unyielding parent who against all odds has moved heaven and earth to bring his child home. And if the story proves to be true, even political super powers, United States and Brazil, got involved to the tune of \$2.75 billion.

It makes me think of the power of a defenseless child over those who surround him or her, unable to care for himself, yet he or she pushes the people around them to go to the extremes to be defended, nurtured and protected. It makes me think, in case like this, how even powerful economic forces got involved in what should have appeared at first as a domestic and civil matter.

Two thousand years ago in a similar political, economic and social crucible Mary, Joseph and Jesus found themselves. It was supposed to be a simple matter of Joseph marrying Mary at the appropriated time and fathering a child, has now become a story of unquestionable faith in God, loyalty and respect for each other, a story of imaginative responses and divine surprises that we repeat every year and one that brings warmth to our hearts.

In the story God has become manifested in the middle of human ambiguity. In the process of doing so He has sent flying traditional understanding of marriage by providing a non-sequitor explanation for Mary's state. God used the need for taxation of the Roman Emperor to place the Holy Family in the neighborhood of Bethlehem, the city of legendary King David. He invited, using a cosmic device, a group of foreign astrologists to come and worship the newborn king who was reposing in an animal trough, not in a throne. God told, using the most spectacular of ways, to a group of shepherds (society moral castaway, suspects of sexual deviations), to do the same and come and worship. God sends via dreams the family running for to a foreign country to escape King Herod's killing of the innocents.

We know the end of the story, we have sugar coated it to the point of losing most of all its sharp angles, but think what went through their heads as God demanded from them a faith beyond intellect, or cultural habits or even God's own law. Mary and Joseph and Jesus were put on the edge of their social group and told to wait and hope and pray — Mary kept pondering everything in her heart- as Scripture says of her state of mind.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's, the German theologian who was killed a few days before the liberation of his concentration camp, commenting on Advent, the liturgical season preceding Christmas, says it well: "Advent is like sitting in a prison cell. One cannot do anything except hope, pray, and wait; deliverance must come from the outside. He should know.

To the Jews Jesus came were prisoners of Imperial Rome, they were subjugated nations, fodder for the grandiose expansion plans of Rome. In the dark for centuries, waiting and praying for deliverance. I have seen or talk to a great number of people in serious distress in the last few days, people who were living their Advent, dark, hopeless, purple. No escape, nowhere to go, no exit. The outside creeping darkness seems to bring a few notches down all of us. The need for light, for answer, for opportunity becomes heightened. We sit in our existential prison cell, and cried to God, pray, hope

and wait. How cruel is the wait, the uncertainty!. We in this country collectively with the economy are like Bonhoeffer in his cell, trying to get ahead without losing one's head, seeking deliverance. We are collectively prisoners of a system that promotes greed and worship of money. Christmas is a season to sing praises, yet in our time the reality of environmental destruction undermines the doxology of creation. The singing of the spheres is obscured by pollution and manufactured noise, the rhythms of the sea are disturbed by climate change, the beauty of many manifestations of life is disfigured by abusive practices rooted in greed. And as the earth suffers, so must its inhabitants. (Dr Sam Kobia)The cosmic event Jesus-Child is like God injecting Himself in the ambiguity of human life, right there in the crack of our common relationship, in there in the dark, humid and tasty environment of sin. He gets in there to spoil the party, to bring forth that was shamefully hidden and to proclaim openly the true possibilities of human living. A child is always somebody's light in their darkness, because a child is what could be and is not yet, a child is the future. Jesus Child is the light in our darkness. Light is the radiant image of God's goodness, in creation and at Christmas. The Creator commands, "Let there be light!" and the universe takes form. At the nativity of Christ, light breaks forth in the midst of darkness and the darkness can never overcome this glowing testament of the living God. In this most holy season, I invite you to walk into the light, to come out of the shadows of apathy and sin, to break forth from the slavery of bitterness and resentment; the invitation is here for you to accept your true calling as child of the Light. God set the stars to give light to the world, but the Star of your life is Jesus. God, an unyielding parent who against all odds has moved heaven and earth to bring his child home, no matter the cost, no matter the sin, welcomes you.