

Tantur Ecumenical Institute



Christmas Newsletter

A Christmas Message

by

*The Very Rev. Timothy S. Lowe (Rector of Tantur)
and his wife Lisa*

Latest News and Events:

- **A Christmas Message** by the Very. Rev. Timothy. S. Lowe & his wife Lisa from Connecticut, USA, (Rector of Tantur.)
- **See the Longing for Peace in each other's Eyes** by Louis Bohte OFM, Bethlehem.
- **"Friends of God"** by Sr. Maureen McBride from New Zealand, based in Rome, Italy.
- **A Reflection for Christmas** by Sr. Bridget Tighe FMDM, from Ireland, based in Guilford, UK. (Vice – Rector of Tantur, 2006 -2011)



The Very Rev. Timothy S. Lowe, Rector of Tantur and his wife Lisa



What shall we offer you, O Christ, because you have appeared on earth as a man for our sakes? For each of the creatures made by you offers you its thanks: the Angels their hymn; the heavens the Star; the Shepherds their wonder; the Magi their gifts; the earth the Cave; the desert the Manger; but we a Virgin Mother. – A Christmas Verse “We” live in troubled times. National economies continue to sink. Jobs are scarcer. Those of us in the Middle East see governments falling. Whatever our assumptions about a certain and secure future with the glory of never-ending enlightened progress and development are somewhat shattered. Mother Earth has passed 7 billion people. Weather patterns are shifting dramatically and often with great destruction. The testing of human hearts is again upon our generation. Who are we? What are we? What defines and makes us? Do we quickly revert to our small tribal loyalties? Our nationalities? Are we just to be governed by our fears and parochial interests? The answer is yes unless something so extraordinary has moved us to embrace a larger reality as difficult and complicated as that can be. We Christians are about to celebrate the feast of the birth of Christ. The above verse reflects the gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke’s narrative of the event. They want to draw our attention that the birth of Christ is not just a local event, not just a world event, but also a cosmic event. It is an event so large and so embracing that our small ticky-tacky lives are given a transcendent embrace and vision of God. And having once seen something grander and more beautiful, something deeper and more profound, can we really revert back to our more primitive and base ways of living and thinking? The answer is of course yes. We revert all the time. We get beaten down. Survival instincts are powerful and easily overwhelm us. And yet the infant born in Bethlehem will grow up and instruct us to let go our lives in order to gain them. He will instruct us not to worry about our basic needs as God our Father is quite aware and attentive to them. He will instruct us not to get caught up completely in a material vision of life which is temporal and thus by definition primitive: “What shall it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose his or her soul?”

So the challenge this Christmas is to be embraced by Christ, angels, stars, magi, mother earth, the entire cosmos and all that it contains and to embrace back. It is here that peace is established and renewed. It is here that justice is not a negotiated settlement but a healing power. It is here that the shared life of humanity is a foretaste of the kingdom of God instead of the endless and empty struggle for meaningless power and survival at the expense of the other. We Christians are called to lead the way whether we are rich or poor, young or old, healthy or infirm.

Christ is born...Glorify him!



**See the Longing for Peace in each other's
Eyes
by
Louis Bohte OFM**



Louis Bohte shares his life with the Friars and People of Bethlehem



Visitors congregate where it all happened at The Church of the Nativity – Bethlehem at Christmas



Once a year all eyes are directed to Bethlehem, when we celebrate and commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ, whom we call the prince of peace. In the northern Hemisphere it is then a time of darkness. We look for light and warmth. This makes Christmas special for our feelings. We dream of peace in the middle of so much turmoil. Let us look for the three monotheistic religions, what they say about peace. In Judaism we know the following text: Isaiah 2, 4 and Micha 4, 3: *“Let us beat swords into plowshares”*. It is a dream of an end of the arms race. But we realize that it is not in our hands to stop the production of arms and we don't know what kind of weapons are developed until they are used in the next war. Jesus was born in this Jewish tradition. He made further steps for the sake of peace. Let us read the text in Matthew and let us think about the impact for us: Matthew 5, 44: Jesus: *“But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do well to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you”*. Jesus speaks about our basic attitudes towards the people we deal with. We need to reflect what these words mean, more than pious thoughts. We need to understand our aggression in ourselves, which everyone has in different ways. How do we know ourselves? Can we handle this challenge, spreading peace around us?

As Christians we confess that Jesus Christ is our way to God, a way marked by peace like the Torah is the way to the Eternal for the Jewish tradition and the Qur'an is the way to Allah for Muslims. They also speak about peace: Qu'ran 60, 7: *“It may be that Allah will establish friendship between you and those who were your enemies”*. Allah is All-Powerful, and Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful. These texts are positive and constructive. Furthermore: who wants peace, needs allies and looks for them. Who wants war, needs enemies and looks for them. It is up to us to make our choice. Let peace prevail. Moreover, Jews are still expecting the Messiah; we look for the return of Jesus just like the Muslims do. How would we receive Jesus in the midst of so much turmoil, economic problems, exclusion of ordinary people who don't have the possibility to earn their living for themselves and their family? From Tantar we can see the wall, which separates people in Bethlehem from other people who long for peace too. Do we have also a wall in our minds, which separates us from other people, because we don't like them? It is easy to blame other people. Jesus went His own way, correcting people, who are not following the way to the Eternal. He showed us a way to God, which is finally hopeful and peaceful. Let us discover how Jesus can inspire us.

Louis Bohte is President of the Commission for Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation for the Friars Minor of the Custody of the Holy Land



“Friend’s of God”

by

Sr. Maureen McBride



1 November, 2011, All Saints Day, Kazakhstan!

With snowflakes swirling on the freezing Steppe of Kokchetau, my ponderings turn back to March 20 2011 when our group from Tantar journeyed to the Sinai Desert. It was a full moon that night and the sunrise from the summit promised to be spectacular! At 2.30 the next morning, however, as we rubbed sleep from our eyes and clambered on to our sturdy camels, the sky had changed. Instead of bright shining stars lighting our way, a dull dark mist greeted us and soft rain accompanied us up the mountain. The fast and fit among us mounted the steps, while a small handful, myself included, felt we mightn't make it to the summit, and were content to remain at a coffee shop en route until just before dawn. Around 5.15 am The Bedouin led us out into a hollow of the rock known as “Elijah’s Peak”, to witness the sunrise. Unfortunately it was freezing cold, there was a great gust of wind, some rain (but no earthquake - thankfully)! Suddenly, for an instant only, but captured on my camera, a faint slither of sun “winked” above the mountaintop and quickly slipped again into the cloud. Uncertain and perhaps a bit disappointed, we rushed back into the warmth and shelter of the coffee shop to await the return of our companions from the summit. In the Hebrew Scriptures Abraham, the father of the nations and the man of righteousness, is referred to as “God’s friend” (2 Chron 20:7; Dan 3:35; Isaiah 41:8). However, it is with Moses on Mt Sinai that the image of friendship as intimacy with God is evoked and developed: *“Moses said to the Lord, ‘you indeed are telling me to lead this people on, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me’. Yet you have said, ‘You are my intimate friend,’ and also, ‘you have found favor with me.’ ‘Now, if I have found favor with you, do let me know your ways so that, in knowing you I may continue to find favor with you’. Then, too, this nation is, after all, your own people. ‘I myself, the Lord answered, will go along, to give you rest.’ Moses replied, ‘If you are not going yourself, do not make us go up from here. For how can it be known that we, your people and I, have found favour with you, except by your going with us’? ‘ Then we, your people and I, will be singled out from every other people on the earth.’ The Lord said to Moses, ‘This request, too, which you have just made, I will carry out, because you have found favor with me and you are my intimate friend.’ Then Moses said, ‘Do let me see your glory!’ The Lord answered, ‘I will make all my beauty pass before you, and in your presence I will pronounce my name, ‘LORD’.” Ex 33:12-21.*

FRIENDS OF GOD IN THE ROMAN CALENDAR

The month of November in the Roman calendar, can be considered in a particular way the feast of the “Friends of God” – those heralded by the Church as models for Christian living - saints. sages. seers. prophets. popes and martyrs!

St. Abraham Retreat Centre - Shchuchinsk, Kazakhstan



Snowflakes swirling on the freezing Steppe of Kokchetau, Kazakhstan.





A Reflection for Christmas by Sr. Bridget Tighe, FMDM

Much has changed for me since I left Tantur in May. I no longer lead groups of pilgrims up the Mount of Temptation, facilitate heated discussions on inter-communion, nor cook breakfast when check-points are closed. As Regional Leader I am drawn into the fabric of people's lives, their commitment, hopes and concerns. I've accepted a young woman into our Novitiate, talked to another who will make final vows in her native Nigeria, and soon join four sisters in celebrating their Platinum Jubilee: 70 years of religious profession. The Virgin Mary's reply to the Angel *Let it be done unto me according to thy word* touches me deeply. There is a time for action, cutting edge decisions and high profile projects, and there is a time for contemplative listening and recognition that, even in the midst of activity, we come to God in an attitude of receptivity and humility: *Let it be done unto me*. This, I believe, is what sustains the novice and the jubilarian and will sustain us in our response to God Incarnate who, in Bethlehem, *became a baby, hanging on a human breast*. (Francis of Assisi)

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