

A reflection on the meaning of Christmas



This month we are sharing a reflection written by José Vincés, Director of Paz y Esperanza Ecuador, on the true meaning of Christmas based on Luke 2 v25-35.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

This is one of the Bible passages that we often hear in sermons at Christmas. However, we don't often reflect on what it meant, the repercussions for people at the time and how our generation should interpret it.

It is interesting to read the prophetic words of Simeon, associated with the prophecy in Isaiah 8 v 14, 15. They express the hope of redemption for a people afflicted by slavery and a lack of human rights. This hope seemed to fade away as the prophecy was not fulfilled in Old Testament times. The birth of Jesus brought about the possibility of a new order, the reversal of the status quo which included abuse of power, oppression and discrimination as opposed to respect, tolerance, equality and justice for the dispossessed. These are all the fundamental principles of the kingdom of God which started with the life and ministry of Jesus.

"A light for revelation to the Gentiles".

A Christmas focused on our consumer culture lacks meaning if the person of Jesus is not at the centre. Without the perspective of Jesus, there is no message of freedom and we do not consider the true meaning of the birth of Emmanuel (God is with us).

The central message of Jesus' life was love and serving others, fighting injustice and trying to meet the basic needs of all men, women and children who have been created in the image of God.

Jesus' sacrifice and death for our sins, taking our place on the cross to give us eternal life, is the ultimate expression of love and service.

For these causes, Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again giving us the glorious hope of having a relationship with him. As his disciples, we should be trying to follow Jesus' example. The kingdom of God began with Him and should continue with our faithful work and the transformation of our lives.

Wishing you all a joyful Christmas and New Year!

With our best wishes and thanks for your prayers and support in 2015.

Graham, Gordon, Tineke and Suzanne

PAZ Y ESPERANZA'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY!

Paz y Esperanza will be celebrating its 20th birthday in January. To mark the occasion we would love to raise £20,000 to send to the offices in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia so they can carry on their amazing work. We will be launching our campaign in January, but please think about what you can do to help us fundraise.

Our trustee Tineke has already done a sponsored challenge doing 20 workouts in 20 days and raised a fantastic £2,000. Our trustee Gordon has pledged to visit 20 churches in 2016 to talk about the work of Paz y Esperanza.

On 13 December, a group of 20 people linked to Paz y Esperanza in three locations in Peru ran 5k to raise money to provide psychological, legal and social support to 20 women who have been affected by violence.



PLEASE PRAY FOR PAZ Y ESPERANZA IN 2016:

- Please give thanks for everything the staff, volunteers and supporters have achieved in 2015 and the many people they have helped.
- For those running Paz y Esperanza's training programmes in 2016, that they may be able to effectively equip churches and communities.
- For new sources of income so that Paz y Esperanza can continue all its services.

BOOK A SPEAKER for your small group or church, to equip you to stand alongside those silenced by oppression and injustice across Latin America.

Email gdavies@pazyesperanza.org

TO GIVE visit <http://www.justgiving.com/pazyesperanza/Donate>

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