



An especially ordinary celebration

The Gospel's description of Christmas is two thousand years old. It is set in a small eastern extremity of the mighty Roman Empire. The main characters were ordinary, modest people, a carpenter and his young bride.

Their arduous journey from their northern homeland to Bethlehem in the south was just one of many, because the emperor's edict that all should be taxed had caused people to journey to their families' tribal cities. There was nothing strange about a baby being born on the journey. Nor was it strange that a lack of room forced them to settle for poor accommodation.

So there's nothing in itself miraculous in the first story of Christmas. What is amazing about it is that one event experienced in the lives of ordinary people long ago has become so significant that we return to it every year all over the world. What is it about this event in the past that is of such great significance for us all?

The key to understanding the special nature of Christmas as well as its universality is Jesus, the child born in Bethlehem. In him God was born as a human being, as one of us. Thus God knows what it is to be human, and thus we can confidently trust God and in God's guidance.

The particular and universal nature of the Christmas events is also a reminder that no one is insignificant in God's eyes. God is in the midst of all human life, whether it is ordinary or extraordinary. Everyone is precious in God's eyes, and God loves us all. So Christmas is a great feast of humanity. It is all the more relevant the more we are aware of anxiety and suffering in the world.

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those
whom he favours!"*
(The Gospel according to Luke 2:14)

I wish you a happy and blessed Christmas!

Tapio Luoma
Archbishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland