



*Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem* ©  
\* *Knights of Malta* \*

December  
2012

## **Chancellor's Update**

### Reflections for Christmas 2012

There was a time when during the month of December the anticipation of Christmas included the trees, the lights, the glitter, the dinner, the parties, the man-made snow and festive songs. Not too long ago while these embellishments remained, the emphasis on Christmas was slowly eroded and was replaced by the holiday – **the holiday!**

Wait a minute. What holiday? Whose holiday? What are we celebrating at this time of year, anyway?

Is this a holiday of hope for peace in the world? Is this a holiday of good cheer and good wishes for your family, friends and neighbors? Is this a time when people mutually exchange gifts, rather than giving gifts exclusively, as at birthdays and special occasions? Is this a time when people share with those less fortunate than themselves?

Is it perhaps a day which others call the Christian's holiday? Is it a day that Christians celebrate because it is the birthday of the founder of their religion? Is it a joyous event because it represents the birth of a baby, who symbolizes peace and love?

If we as Christians are celebrating Christmas for any or all of the above reasons, and for nothing more encompassing, then we have missed the point of who we are, why we are here and why we are celebrating.

To understand this point we must return to the beginning of mankind. What was the most important event in the history of man? Obviously, the most important event, because it was the most necessary event, was the creation of man. If God had not created man **ever**, then none of us would be here today reading this paper.

When God created man, He gave him special gifts above his nature. In addition to the beautiful garden, which was maintenance-free, God gave man great knowledge, control over his passions by reason, and freedom from suffering and death. Because he lacked sense appetites, his body was subject to his mind and his mind was subject to God. He was also given sanctifying grace, which was a share in the life of God, and a promise for the future, which was the right to go to heaven after his sojourn on earth.

To keep all these gifts there was only one condition which man had to fulfill, namely, not to eat of the fruit of a specific tree in the garden. Whether eating that fruit was symbolic or real is unimportant; the fact is that man was given one condition of which he was fully aware.

After some period of time had passed, man now came to the second most important and the saddest event in the history of mankind, the eating of the restricted fruit. Because of this incident, man lost freedom from suffering and death, lost his great knowledge and lost control over his passions. He lost his share in the life of God and his future right to heaven. The maintenance-

free garden became cursed in man's future work. The worst part was that this punishment was not only for the first man, but also for all generations that would succeed him.

Because of her sin, Eve was to bear her children in pain and sorrow, and she would become more dependent emotionally on man. Because both Adam and Eve committed the sin, this punishment also passed on to all of Eve's descendants.

### **In other words, ADAM BLEW IT!**

And yet, even at the darkest moment in man's history, God offered some hope. Although the preternatural gifts were totally lost during the earthly sojourn, God offered some hope for the future. The offense given to the creator could be satisfied only by an infinite being. It was God's plan to restore everything in Christ, the God-Man, which had been ruined in Adam.

"Therefore as from the offense of the one man (Adam) the result was unto condemnation to all men, so from the justice of the one (Christ) the result is unto justification or life to all men. For just as by the disobedience of the one man the many were constituted sinners, so also by the obedience of the one the many will be constituted just (Romans 5:18-19)." St. Paul also said, "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, bearing witness in his own time (I Timothy 2:5, 6)."

While Good Friday commemorates the greatest event in the history of mankind, namely, our Redemption, and Easter Sunday offers verification of the events of Good Friday, Christmas reminds us that the Redeemer promised in the garden has arrived and Redemption appears on the horizon for the near future.

In earlier times Christians were more aware of the relationship of these two events. From the eleventh century on, a mystery play, called the paradise play, was presented during Advent. The creation of man, the sin of Adam and Eve, and their punishment were presented. The climax of the play was the promise of the Redeemer and the incarnation. In later centuries the paradise and shepherds' Nativity plays were always associated because these earlier Christians knew that if the Fall of man had not occurred, there would never have been the Redemption.

When a baby is about to be born, there is anticipation and perhaps even a few baby showers. However, the joy and celebration do not end with the birth of the baby. Likewise, during Advent there should be anticipation of what the birth of the Christ child means, but after the birth, just as the Christians of an earlier time celebrated, we, too, should continue to celebrate at least until the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6.

With this Scriptural and traditional background we understand who we are, what we might have been, why we are in this valley of tears, and what we can do about it. It is in this spirit that we, in the Order, wish you most wholeheartedly: "**Merry Christmas.**"

Copyright 2012 by the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Inc. All rights reserved. The O.S.J. Messenger and the Chancellor's Update are among the authorized publications of the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Inc. and the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem-Knights of Malta. World Headquarters and Convent of the Order are located in Reading, Pennsylvania in the United States of America.



Jerusalem 1048-1291, Cyprus 1291-1310, Rhodes 1311-1523, Malta 1530-1798, Russia 1798-1907, U.S.A. 1908-

<http://sovereignorderofsaintjohnofjerusalemknightsofmalta.org/>