

Advent from a Vincentian Perspective, Part 6: The Birth of Christ: The Joy of Advent and the Vincentian Vocation

Advent is a season filled with anticipation, hope, and a deep sense of joy that builds toward the celebration of Christ's birth. For Christians, this time of waiting is not just a passive experience but an active preparation for the coming of our Savior. The joy of Advent culminates in the Nativity, the birth of Jesus, who enters the world to bring salvation, peace, and love. For those living the Vincentian vocation, the joy of Christmas is intimately connected with the joy of serving the poor and needy—echoing the biblical teaching, “*God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Corinthians 9:7).



The Joy of Christ's Birth: Fulfillment of Advent's Hope

The story of Christ's birth is one of profound joy, not just for the individuals present but for all of humanity. The angels announced this joy to the shepherds, proclaiming, “*I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people*” (Luke 2:10). This “good news” is that God, in His infinite love, chose to become human and dwell among us, offering us the gift of salvation and reconciliation.

In Advent, we prepare ourselves spiritually for this celebration. Each week, the lighting of the Advent candles marks our journey closer to Christmas, reflecting hope, peace, love, and joy. The last candle, often referred to as the “Joy” candle, reminds us that the long-awaited promise of the Messiah has been fulfilled. The birth of Christ is the ultimate expression of God’s love, and through this event, He enters human history as a vulnerable child, born in a humble manger, surrounded by the poor and the outcast. It is in this humble birth that we see the heart of Vincentian spirituality—recognizing Christ in the poor and serving Him with joy and dedication.

The Vincentian Vocation: Serving the Poor with Joy

The Vincentian charism, inspired by Saint Vincent de Paul, teaches that Christ is present in the poor and suffering. Vincentians are called to recognize the face of Christ in those who are marginalized and forgotten by society. But more than that, they are called to serve with joy, reflecting the very heart of God’s love.

Saint Vincent de Paul and his followers understood that serving the poor is not a burden but a gift. To be called to serve those in need is to participate in the mission of Christ Himself. Saint Vincent often encouraged his companions to approach their work with enthusiasm and joy, no matter how difficult it might be. He believed that true charity is marked by joyfulness, not begrudging obligation.

This idea is beautifully captured in the biblical phrase, “*God loves a cheerful giver.*” In the Vincentian tradition, this doesn’t just refer to giving material goods but to giving oneself completely—time, compassion, energy—with a joyful heart. Serving the poor becomes a source of joy when we understand it as a way of serving Christ, who came into the world not as a king but as one of the least.

Joy and Humility: The Birth of Christ as a Vincentian Example

The birth of Christ in a lowly manger surrounded by animals is a striking image of humility. It reminds us that God did not choose wealth, power, or comfort but instead embraced poverty. Jesus was born into a humble, impoverished setting, which speaks to the Vincentian call to live a life of simplicity and service.

For Vincentians, the humility of the Nativity is a profound example. The poor, like the shepherds who were the first to hear of Christ’s birth, are often the ones closest to God’s heart. In the same way, those who serve the poor with humility and joy are drawn closer to Christ. The joy of Christmas, then, is not found in material gifts or worldly success but in following the example of Christ by humbling ourselves and giving generously to those in need.

This humility is central to the Vincentian vocation. Just as Christ lowered Himself to enter into human suffering, Vincentians are called to leave behind their comfort and enter into the struggles of the poor, not out of duty but out of love. As Saint Vincent taught, we should strive to keep our hearts open to the sufferings and wretchedness of other people, and *“God will grant you the grace of softening our hearts toward the wretched creatures and of realizing that in helping them we are doing an act of justice and not of mercy.”* (CCD VII:115)

Joy in Action: The Daily Call to Serve

While the joy of Advent reaches its peak in the birth of Christ, it doesn't end there. The true meaning of Christmas invites us to carry this joy into our daily lives, especially through acts of charity. The Vincentian vocation reminds us that the joy of Christmas is not confined to a single day but is something we live through our actions year-round.

Saint Vincent de Paul taught that joy is deeply linked to action. His followers are encouraged to act swiftly in meeting the needs of the poor, much like how Mary, upon hearing the news of her pregnancy, hurried to help her cousin Elizabeth. Vincent himself often spoke about the need for “effective love”—a love that doesn't just feel compassion but acts on it.

“God Loves a Cheerful Giver”

The words “God loves a cheerful giver” serve as a powerful reminder during the Advent season. This cheerfulness comes not from external circumstances but from the deep, abiding joy of knowing we are loved by God and called to share that love with others. When we give of ourselves, especially to the poor, with a joyful heart, we mirror the generosity of God, who gave His only Son to the world.

Saint Vincent de Paul understood that this joy in service is transformative. Not only does it uplift those who are served, but it also transforms the giver. In serving others with joy, we encounter Christ Himself, and through this encounter, our own hearts are changed.

The joy of Christmas, then, is not something that fades once the decorations come down. It is a joy that lives on in our acts of service, our dedication to the poor, and our commitment to living out the love of Christ each day.

A Call to Action

The joy of Christmas compels us to move beyond ourselves and serve others with dedication and cheerfulness. Whether through visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, or comforting the lonely, Vincentians are called to bring the joy of Christ's love to those most in need.

Questions for Personal and Community Reflection

1. How can I bring the joy of Christ's birth into my daily life, especially in my interactions with those in need?
2. In what ways can I serve the poor with greater humility and joy, following the example of Christ's birth in a humble manger?
3. How can our community foster a spirit of cheerful giving, not only during the Christmas season but throughout the year?