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Christmas invites us to see beyond our present

Some Christians never allow a day to go by without remembering the night that Jesus was born. They're not just looking forward to Christmas. They're looking forward to eternity with God. I doubt I can capture this ideal in words, but I want to try. Christmas invites us to catch a glimpse of all that lies beyond our present world.

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When Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem, they couldn't find a place to stay. They were tired from the long journey, and things were looking bad. All they could manage was a cave in the hills. A night of incredible joy followed all those setbacks. Angels filled the earth with song and shepherds came to adore the newborn King.

It was one of those rare events where God draws back the veil that separates time and eternity. We get some sense of this when St Luke tells us how the shepherds, after seeing the Child Jesus, spread the news of what they had witnessed and “everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say.” St Luke also notes a revealing detail: Mary was so moved that “she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

Since we are about to celebrate Christmas, I choose to describe Christ's birth. I could have picked a dozen other scenes from the Gospel which speak of a world that is very real and yet impossible to define. As you approach the feast of Christ's birth, reflect on your own experience. You may have something in your past—or you will experience it in the future—that is equally wonderful. It is a moment, like Joseph and Mary arriving in Bethlehem, when everything seems to be going wrong and God seems to have forgotten that you exist. It is a moment when something inside suddenly changes and, despite all your problems, you are filled with unspeakable joy because God gives you a small taste of eternity.

The ancients were wise enough to describe life here below as a “valley of tears”. As one of the saints said, this life is like “a bad night in a bad

inn”. Even so, God wants us to have an idea of what awaits us on the other side of death. The Holy Spirit gives us these moments of joy, and we ought to be grateful for them.

Learn to treasure the times when God allows you to see what eyes cannot see. “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” You will learn to give little importance to things that go wrong and, instead, look forward to the day when you will enter heaven once and for all.

This article by Fr. Joe Babendreier first appeared in the Sunday Nation on 23rd December 2012.