



# The Wondrous Gift of FAITH

Christmas  
Message by  
Swami Jyotirmayananda

**A**s we celebrate Christmas this year, try to direct your attention to the spirit behind Christmas. How can a person develop that spirit that will turn life into an experience of joy, that will turn every day of his life into a festivity?

In this Divine creation there is a mysterious plan. Every now and then, humanity is gifted with Saints and Sages who possess such spiritual illumination and spiritual power that they dazzle the minds of people. Lord Krishna states in the Gita that whenever there is a rise in unrighteousness and a decline in virtue, the Divine Self incarnates to destroy negative forces and to establish positive forces in their stead. Hence creation is blessed with great saintly personalities. Lord Jesus is

a brilliant example—an avatar, or incarnation of the Divine Self.

**A**lthough there are many people who are completely materialistic, nevertheless there have always been ideals preserved over the centuries that were given to humanity by these Sages. When a person becomes frustrated by his worldly and materialistic involvement, he can turn to Jesus, refer to the Bible, and find expressions of Divine inspiration. He can turn to Buddha and learn about the amazing power of love and compassion; or derive encouragement from Krishna and his remarkable expressions of joy—dancing by the Yamuna River. All these ideals are there before humanity.

Suppose there were no such ideals. Suppose that life was meant to be devoted just to the pleasures of the senses and the acquisition of material wealth, later ending in darkness. That would be a most miserable destiny for humanity. However, these spiritual ideals that have been presented by Sages resound a Truth: there is inherent within every person the potential by which he can triumph over matter, rise beyond the body, and become united with God. That is an underlying pointer, a beckoning light exemplified by the cross in Christianity.

The cross expresses the mystic message that the Kingdom of Heaven is within each person. The cross symbolizes two directions. The horizontal direction in a person's life is the pursuit of worldly accomplishments. The vertical direction represents the pursuit of spiritual ideals—the quest for the Kingdom of God. The vertical aspect of the cross points to the fact that you have universality within, and that you are intrinsically one with God. You have the power and the ability to allow your identification with the body and ego to dissolve. The cross represents the sacrifice of identifying with the limited self and the flourishing of your own Godhood. That is the ideal which is presented by all great Saints and Sages.

There is a story that illustrates the vanity behind life without spiritual value. I have adapted it from one written by Leo Tolstoy: A poor man traveled into a village looking for a job that would provide him with more material security. There he met a crafty, greedy, and wealthy landowner who told him, "I will give you as much land as you want with one condition: At sunrise tomorrow, you should start running and you should not stop until sunset. Whatever land you cover during that time shall be yours free of charge."

The man, whose intellect was just as impoverished as his pocket, feverishly planned all night how he would run a vast circle to claim his land. He even worked out a mathematical formula that would ensure the acquisition of the most land possible. When daylight broke, he began the race. On and on he went, running so much that by nightfall just as he had finished defining a vast tract of land for himself, he had a heart attack and died. The rich man laughed and had his body put in a coffin and buried six feet underground. That is all the land he received.

This is the predicament of people who do not have Self-realization as their target. If you do not have this spiritual value as your goal, then life is spent attempting to cover vast regions of this relative world-process by acquiring as much "land" as possible—objects and conditions of the world. It is spent in illusion (*Maya*). And you continue doing so from incarnation to incarnation. But none of these acquisitions are really tangible! As you exit from one embodiment and enter another, you do not carry all that you have acquired with you; for it is all left behind!

Therefore, Lord Jesus says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God; and His righteousness and these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33) Turn your mind to that great goal—the Kingdom of Heaven (Self-realization). Without it, all your attainments in this world become vanities. With this goal, every attainment has a purpose.

A teacher in India used to give an illustration of this same point in mathematical terms. Suppose you have a string of zeroes, which you know have no value. However, place a "one" in front of them and then they all have meaning. Similarly, the zeroes of your life are things like wealth, relationships, and success in business. If you are moving steady-

ly towards God, which can be represented as “one,” then all the zeroes of your life have merit. But take away the inward rootedness in God and they have no value at all. You may have collected millions of zeroes, yet symbolically speaking, they count for naught.

**K**eeping that in view, Lord Jesus speaks of the power of faith. That is the ringing note of all religions of the world: to have immense faith within yourself that God is within you, to not just believe, but realize that the world is a Divine plan. If one were to develop the kind of faith that a child has for his mother—simple, direct, and free of any crookedness or complexity—life would be a perpetual Christmas. You would not have any room for worry, anxiety, or fear. Imagine living each day without such stress. That is what we mean by developing faith in God.

However, do not equate it with sectarian dogma. Faith does not imply that you must believe in certain dogmas or doctrines. Faith transcends these. Faith in the light of Yoga is known as *shraddha*. When your intellect becomes free of mental complexes such as jealousy, judgementalism, and anger, it develops a spiritual sensitivity. The Truth begins to dawn within your heart. Although you may not have all the logic and rationality to prove a mystical fact, still you know it to be true. Though you may not command enough reasoning to prove that you existed before your birth as the spirit, yet you develop an inner, unflinching faith that you did. In other words, faith reaches beyond your intellect, yet never contradicts it. Rather, faith inspires your intellect to explore further in order to authenticate it. Such faith moves mountains.

**T**urn to some of the inspiring statements of Jesus: “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that

even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (Matthew 6:28-29)

If you see the way in which God’s power and intelligence operates behind the smallest creatures in nature, could you not develop that kind of trust for your own life? If God has showered so much attention upon a beautiful lily that is there in the morning and gone by the evening, how much more so has He bestowed upon a human being, in a human body that is already a profound expression of Divine Art?

Lord Jesus further says, “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Matthew 6:26)

**I**f that is true, think of how many more blessings a human being has. There is an episode from Indian history that is pertinent to this idea. In the seventeenth century there was a great Maharashtrian king named Shivaji. From a youthful age, he was a disciple of Sage Samathram Das, who helped him to become a brave and heroic man. From a simple boy, he grew to be a powerful king. As a king, he subjugated evil forces in those days that were against the order and harmony of society. However, after he was crowned king, over time, he became preoccupied with the treasury and other royal responsibilities, lost that inner relaxation, and began to develop stress in his daily life.

One day when he was in a morose and miserable state of mind, Samathram Das noticed this and said, “Let us go for a walk.” During the walk his teacher pointed to a rock and said, “Shivaji, pick up that rock and break it open.” He did so and a frog that had been hibernating inside the rock emerged. Samathram Das said, “Look, Shivaji, who takes care of that frog? Do you?”

The idea behind the narrative is that even in the most remote crevasses and hidden parts of the earth, the Divine Hand reaches out and sustains each life. So why should you put yourself under such stress—as if you are so important? Why must you feel that unless you move this train of the world-process, it will not move at all?

Children sometimes board a train and begin to push on the seat thinking they will move the train. When the train proceeds they think that it was their pushing that caused the train to go forward. However, that is ridiculous. Human ego plays the same ridiculous game.

But as a reaction to this you may think, “If I do not do things, how can faith make them happen? The fact is that faith does not contradict your self-effort. Do all that you can do but without stress. Self-effort should continue in your daily life for promoting happiness, harmony, and prosperity, but without the anxiety. If you do so, then your self-effort becomes more concentrated, more qualitative, and more productive.

Under pressure your self-effort becomes quantitative. You race through life

and acquire many things just like the king in the parable, but inwardly you become hollow. That is the great message—the message of faith. And where there is faith, there is eternal hope. The Divine is within you. And that experience of God is not imaginary. That experience of joy transcends all earthly treasures.

Realization of God is a fact that has been demonstrated before humanity through incarnation after incarnation: Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, and Rama. Look into the history of great Saints and Sages. Socrates sipped poison with a poised mind. Bhishma lay on a bed of arrows, triumphing over his body. Such amazing illustrations of spiritual power have been presented before humanity.

**B**ut faith has to be cultivated. It is not a matter of sitting down and saying, “Yes, starting tomorrow I’m going to have intense faith.” To that extent it is fine, but you must realize that developing faith is not a sentimental project. It must be cultivated gradually day by day, inspired by the spiritual goal—the Kingdom of God.

During the day observe your mind. The actions that you perform should be complet-

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ed with the spirit of worshipping God. Every opportunity of serving God within others must be seized with great eagerness. There is no greater opportunity for a person than to be able to express his goodness and kindness wherever such an opportunity arises. Express it. Whenever you see someone miserable whom you can inspire, do so. Wherever there is darkness, bring a little light. Wherever there is tension, bring a little harmony. In so doing, you gradually promote within yourself purity of heart (*chitta shuddhi*).

But if you are centered only on the ego day by day, thinking, “What should I do for myself and my loved ones?” then all your Divine power remains restricted. However, when you begin to express yourself through acts of selflessness, generosity, and love of humanity, you will manifest a more powerful result.

If you have a general plan in daily life that includes meditation, prayer, *satsanga* (association with those who are wise), and service of humanity, you gradually harmonize your personality in a profound way. You enjoy attunement with Nature. You realize that the same Hand that allows the lilies to bloom and shines through the sun and the moon is behind your pulsating heart. You are always in God.

With this understanding life becomes inspiring. Little by little you shed your burden, remove your complexes, and break the fetters. Each day you will discover yourself experiencing more freedom. If you live in that way, you are enjoying a life of faith, a life of true spirituality, a life of the greatest joy.

**May Lord Jesus bestow  
Upon you that  
wondrous gift of faith.  
And may that faith  
blossom into  
Liberation!**



## FROM SWAMIJI'S KITCHEN

### Whole Wheat Paratha

- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 small onion, finely grated and fried gently in butter
- 1/2 teaspoon caraway seeds
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- salt to taste
- \*Ajwain or oregano, a pinch
- \*Mangarel, a pinch
- oil or ghee

**Make a stiff dough with water. Knead it thoroughly. Add the fried onions, spices, and salt.**

**Break off small balls and flatten each ball with the help of a rolling pin. Spread flour on the board to avoid sticking.**

**On a heated skillet over medium to high heat fry each paratha on both sides by using spoonfuls of oil.**

**This dish can be eaten with any vegetable preparation, or alone at breakfast or with lunch.**

**\* These spices are available in Indian shops.**