



AND YET...

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Christmas has been considered by everyone from theologians, writers, poets, artists and advertisers. Every year people from every continent adorn their homes and streets with festive lights in honour of that radiant Light that knows no setting, Our Lord Jesus.

And yet... there is still so much to learn about Christmas, to listen to, to understand, to ponder in one's heart and to make known with renewed faith to the new generations.

Listen! "And there were in the same country shepherds... And behold an angel of the Lord stood by them" (Lk 2,8). The Lord continues to speak to us and makes His voice heard in different ways. In Bethlehem, the shepherds who were the closest to the grotto and symbolise the poor and humble were the first to receive Him, but the Magi too, who were the most distant and who symbolise the world of culture and learning, heard His silent voice. Both had something in common, though. Both were prepared to set out on a journey, to venture out from their places of safety whether a fortress like Herod's, or the humble hearth like that of the shepherds.

Today, more than ever, we are called to venture out from our habitual, routine ways to allow ourselves to be guided and taught how to listen and to hear that 'voice,' that more and more risks being stifled by the noise of our lives or the no less dangerous si-

lence of closed hearts.

Understand! The Magi were men of culture and learning and the shepherds were no academics, but both possessed the gift of wisdom. We can know many things while at the same time fail to understand the essence of things. We can dig and search for water endlessly in defective wells, while all the time streams of life giving water flow below our very feet.

The difficult and demanding task of progressing from knowledge to understanding and science to wisdom, has become something rare today.

Ponder in one's heart! "But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2, 19). Speed, change, and the frantic search for novelty are traits typical of the modern world. To keep and ponder in one's heart unhurriedly is an activity that is considered unproductive, or at most a luxury permitted only to few.

The holy Virgin who brings to us the Infant Jesus, instead teaches us that a tree to be healthy and bear much fruit needs roots that are deep and strong. To keep and ponder in one's heart means giving the seed within us time and space. It does not matter if the seed is that of a mustard tree or that of a giant sequoia. What matters is that it finds a little soil and the sincere desire not to choke it with thorns. (cf. Mt 13,1-23).

Make known! "When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them

about this Child" (Lk 2,17).

Pope Benedict XVI has called for a Year of Faith, above all, to give the whole of the Christian community the opportunity to re-appropriate and rediscover the beauty of the faith handed down to us by the Fathers of the Church, but also to rediscover, like the apostles, the joy and the enthusiasm of making it known to the people of our time.

To make known to others the message of Christmas means speaking, above all, about our own personal encounter with Christ the Lord, Our Saviour. This must take precedence to the narrating of the historical facts, even if extraordinary, that took place in the days of the Emperor Caesar Augustus and when Cyrenus was the governor of Syria.

The new evangelisation can only begin after long meditation and adoration before the "infant wrapped in swaddling clothes laid in a manger" (Lk 2, 12).

For Padre Pio, a disciple of Francis of Assisi and of Franciscan spirituality, Christmas was a time of contemplation of Almighty God's love and humility. He would remind his spiritual children continuously of this encouraging them to respond to Love with love.

This too is what I wish to remind myself and Padre Pio's devotees who, after so many Christmases, might be inclined to think that there is nothing more to learn...

And yet...

