

Joseph. the Earthly Father of Jesus  
by Joe Aliling  
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How do we celebrate Christmas in this pandemic environment? This question brings to mind an experience I had in my youth when I was stranded in a war zone in the Southern Philippines. No airlines would attempt to fly in or out during the intense fighting for fear of being shut down by anti-aircraft missiles.

It was Christmas school break, at the height of the nationwide student power movement in Philippine history, right before the advent of the so-called First Quarter Storm, which ushered in the Declaration of Martial Law by President Ferdinand E. Marcos. As chairman of the Inter-Fraternity Sorority Council (IFSC), I was obliged to attend the annual conference of the National Students League held in the heart of Islamic-controlled Southern Philippines. The area was a war zone between government soldiers and the Muslim secessionist army. At that time, it was a romantic and novel idea for the leaders of the nationwide student movement to show solidarity against both the Philippine society's status quo (the elite families and oligarchs) and the rebellion (led by communists and secessionists) in our country, and for us to "grandstand play" in the middle of the political and religious conflict. It would give us propaganda mileage, drawing maximum international and national media coverage.

In the Muslim-controlled areas, there were no Christmas lights, lanterns, and ornaments displayed anywhere. No Christmas carols were heard in the air, multimedia, along the streets, neighborhoods and commercial areas. But in spite of their absence, I felt the Spirit of Christmas in my heart and all my being. It gave me a greater understanding of the real meaning of Christmas, the importance of the birth of Jesus Christ and his subsequent atonement for the salvation of all children of our Father in Heaven. Since that time, my mortal life was driven by the same promise of God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, i.e., for me to enjoy "divine happiness together with my family for all time and throughout eternity."

Thus, Christmas is really not what your eyes see, or your ears hear, and your participation in the holiday atmosphere and festivities around you. Christmas is what you feel and dwells within you... in your heart, mind and soul.

In contemplating the Christmas season, John Wallingford wrote: "Christmas is not a day or a season, but a condition of heart and mind. If we love our neighbors as ourselves; if in our riches we are poor in spirit and in our poverty we are rich in grace; if our charity vaunteth not itself, but suffereth long and is kind; if when our brother asks for a loaf, we give ourselves instead; if each day dawns in opportunity and sets in achievement, however small; then every day is Christ's day and Christmas is always near."

In order to keep the Spirit of Christmas alive this holiday season in 2020, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came out with a new video entitled "The Christ Child." This video showed a new and fresh perspective of the Nativity story. It is far different from the usual pageantry and formality of the traditional story. The new Nativity story is presented in two parts (or Acts), thus, avoiding the difficulty of mixing together the story

told in Luke 2 and the story told in Matthew 2. Act 1 is the account of Luke, and Act 2 is the account of Matthew.

In my opinion, this new video is a special gift that we receive at this perilous time. It is a testament that this Nativity story really happened in real life, and that Jesus Christ is our Light of the world and the Salvation of humanity. So, "whom shall we fear?"

According to the film makers, they would like to show the "relationship between Mary and Joseph, displaying their emotions as real persons who are experiencing something extraordinary." The video strikes a chord in our family because it also tells the story of Joseph who, in the past, had been presented as a side character and always in the shadows. Joseph had a divine mandate. He had at least two heavenly visitations.

When my paternal grandparents gave birth to their youngest child and christened him Jose (the Hispanic version of Joseph), it was clear in their minds that they would make him a testament of their own love for the Holy Family. Both had Mary and Joseph to emulate in raising and nurturing their children. To accentuate their devotion to the Holy Family, they also christened their only daughter Josefa (which is the feminine version of Jose). My paternal grandmother's name is Maria, the Hispanic version of Mary. And all male offsprings in the four generations of my father's posterity carry his name. So far, there are 25 sons, grandsons, great grandsons who carry the name Jose Aliling.

I remember my father's spiritual thought at dinner time wherein he taught and reminded us of Saint Joseph's three-fold role as a patriarch: 1) a loving husband to his wife, Mary, 2) a devoted father to his son, Jesus, and 3) as a skilled carpenter, a provider for his family with a good quality life. He often counseled us to keep Joseph as the patron saint of the Aliling family. It has been 108 years since my father was born on February 28, 1912 in Taal, Batangas, within the Tagalog Region in the Philippine Islands.

My father's wish was for his posterity to exercise their individual will and God-given birthright "freedom of agency" to willingly take upon themselves the name of Saint Joseph. And always remember Saint Joseph... with the end in view of giving honor to Saint Joseph's name through their words and deeds.

In closing, I would like to give you this special Christmas gift -- Jesus himself -- the so-called "The Christ Child" for this pandemic season. I hope that you can share this inspiring beautiful perspective of "The Christ Child: A Nativity Story" with your family. Please click on the links:

The Christ Child

<https://youtu.be/yXWoKi5x3lw>

Insights behind the scenes

<https://youtu.be/oXz0kWCsy2M>

Merry Christmas!