

## **Monday – Second Week – Preparation and Welcome**

### **A Story of Preparation and Welcome**

Way up in the Northwest Territories, there was a well-known Dene artist. The parish priest asked him to paint a mural in the Church depicting the scene of Bethlehem. The picture was to be unveiled at Christmas. He reluctantly agreed to do so.

In August, he put up the scaffolding for the mural – but as the months passed, the artist kept on delaying. Finally in the third week of Advent, the parish priest said to him, “You do not seem to want to complete this mural, do you?” He quietly agreed. “You see,” he told the priest, “in our Tribe, there would be no way on earth, that a pregnant mother would be turned away. Every home would welcome such a mother to be. I cannot even imagine the scene, and hence it is impossible to paint it.”

### **Reflection**

Isaiah tells the story of the exiles returning from Babylon to Jerusalem. The journey was long. It was over hills and valleys. But the Lord was taking charge. The Lord was preparing a highway.

A story of preparation by God is a challenge to us as we prepare for Christmas. It is not just a historical event that took place 2000 years ago, but a ‘Christmas’ as Christ comes once again into our world.

In the Old Testament, a stranger even from an enemy clan would be welcomed if he or she sought refuge. In the Sanskrit language there is an idiom that says: “The stranger is like God asking for a home. He must always be accepted.”

The story of Mary and Joseph finding no place cannot and must not be repeated in our world, in our country, in our parishes today. So, we

welcome not only friends and family, but as a community, we reach out to the new immigrant, the refugee, those on the fringes of the community.

Our preparation for the celebration of the birth of Christ involves meditation on the fact that we too have experienced welcome, reconciliation and forgiveness at times.

Our preparation requires a grateful heart as Psalm 100 says: “Give thanks to him and bless his name.”

We have not been called that far in our preparation for Christmas. Perhaps all we have been called to do is to be reconciled with one of our own – a friend, a family member, a neighbour, a person from another faith.

### **Question to Ponder**

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me,” says Jesus in Matthew 25:35. How friendly and welcoming are we to newcomers in the neighbourhood, to new immigrants in the parish?