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Called to Live the Joy of Gospel Solidarity

by Dr. Alex Mikulich

The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.

So begins Pope Francis' papal exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*—The Joy of the Gospel. These timely words greet us this Advent as we prepare the way of the Lord, the in-breaking of God's love in our midst. People of faith everywhere proclaim, sing, and share the greatest gifts of all time: God's unconditional love born into vulnerable human life.

Leave no doubt that the birth of Jesus is the definitive moment of all history. Pope Francis proclaims that the freedom of Christian joy is not freedom *from* time and history, but freedom to rejoice in the gifts of love and life that we are given to share with all others *in* history. Echoing the opening words of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope Francis reminds us that the "joy and hope, the grief and anguish" of all people is the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. The freedom of Christian joy is the freedom to love and live in solidarity with all those who in any way are excluded, abandoned, demeaned, or suffering in the world.

In a world full of violence, empty consumerism, and pernicious cynicism and despair, Pope Francis calls us back to the Gift of life, love, and salvation given to each of us personally and shared by all. Pope Francis reminds us of Mary's song of praise: "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47).



The joy of the Gospel is not born of giving or getting things. The joy of the Gospel is found in the birth of the child Jesus who is not born into celebrity, wealth, or earthly royalty but rather in the midst of utter simplicity with no fanfare, save the music of birds and the joy of humble shepherds. As commercial pageantry overtakes Christmas, we may forget the meaning of the shepherds. Shepherds, who were considered no better than slaves and thus banned from giving witness in that historical context, were the only witnesses to the birth of Jesus. Imagine that: God chooses people at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy—the least among us—to be witnesses to the Holy Family and God's birth! God gives the shepherds the most honorable place in the whole of creation! And Mary rejoices in God for "he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on all ages will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48).

We are called to rejoice with the shepherds and reflect with Mary in humble awe and reverence: "God is born for us!" This is the definitive moment of all time and of our time. God's birth is an event that changes history and us. In our defining moment of history, how do we live the joy of Gospel solidarity?

Mural: Angel and Shepherds, Jesuit Chapel, Arrupe College, Harare, Zimbabwe.

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JSRI Upcoming Events

January 15-18

Fr. Kammer and Ms. Baudouin to lead social justice retreat for Jesuit volunteers of the southern region in Texas.

JSRI Recent Activities

November 14

Dr. Weishar participated in a Biloxi MS meeting of the Board of El Pueblo/Seashore Mission--which serves immigrants and homeless persons on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

November 22

JSRI staff volunteered at the Harry Tompson homeless service center in downtown New Orleans.

November 23

Dr. Weishar co-organized the rally of *Nuns and Friends for Immigration Reform* on the Loyola campus and [their call to end intense immigration raids](#).

November 25

The *Lafayette Advertiser* quoted Dr. Mikulich for an [editorial](#) against predatory payday lending.

December 1

Dr. Mikulich is a contributor to *Unshakeable Belief: Advent 2013: Reflections on the Daily Lectionary Readings* available from [Pax Christi USA](#).

December 1

Six Loyola Service Learning students completed a semester teaching ESL to adult immigrants at *Café con Ingles*, an outreach and service program co-founded by Dr. Sue Weishar at St. Anthony of Padua Church in New Orleans.

December 4

Fr. Kammer introduced Washington DC Loyola alumni to the mission and work of JSRI at their Christmas gathering.

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS

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Office Phone: 504- 864-7746 | E-mail: jsri@loyno.edu | Website: www.loyno.edu/jsri
Mailing Address: 6363 St. Charles Avenue, Campus Box 94, New Orleans, LA 70118