**THE HOLY NIGHT**

“WE ALL LIVE UNDER THE SAME SKY, BUT WE DON’T ALL HAVE THE SAME HORIZON.”

“For a long time there were only your footprints and laughter in our dreams, but even from such small things we knew we could not wait to love you forever.”

The cold wintery breeze was blowing outside. The sky was lit up with a thousand twinkling stars. As the beautiful carols played softly, the people were slowly coming in and taking their seats in the church.

Cycril , his wife Cecelia and me , also came in and took our seats in the very first row. The church was almost full. It was a very special service, the Christmas midnight service.

As the clock struck twelve, the church bells began to chime . The whole atmosphere resounded with their melodious sound. The main celebrant reverently kissed the beautiful statue of baby Jesus and gently placed it in the crib set up beside the altar.

The choir played the music, and Anjali started singing. “Silent night… holy night…all is calm , all is bright…”

I was too eager to listen to her. She was Cecelia and Cycril’s 15 year old daughter. For the first time she was giving a solo performance on this auspicious night.

Every one was mesmerized by her sweet and melodious voice. As she continued singing , a dozen of children dressed as angels surrounded the crib and paid homage to the new born child.

Cycril and Cecelia were listening to their daughter completely overwhelmed. They lifted their eyes to the altar and joined their hands in thanksgiving. My heart too was a part of their celebration.

Cecelia and me were childhood friends, went to the same school, the same college and now were settled in the same town. Cecelia and Cycril were both very fond of children and were very close to my kids. I loved the care and pampering they showered upon my two daughters, but always felt very sad for them . I could deeply feel the longing and the yearning they had for a child.

They had consulted the best of doctors, tried every possible treatment ,but of no use. Year after year they had attended the midnight service and prayed to Mother Mary to bless them with a child.

Ten long years had passed by , but they continued waiting for the god’s gift with unwavering faith.

How can I forget that Christmas night?

That year, we all had gone to Pune to spend our Christmas with Cecelia’s sister. It was a small church but beautifully lit up. We all sat in the front row and devoutedly took part in the solemn celebration.

In front of them, Sister Upasana was sitting with 20 tiny children around her. She belonged to the Congregation of the Missionaries of Charity and was in charge of the orphanage.

All the children were beautifully dressed in pristine white frocks and were all ready to take part in the programme. Only little baby Anjali was fast asleep in Sister Upasana’s arms. She was just an infant of 8 months and knew nothing about the significance of the whole event.

After the Eucharistic Celebration , all the tiny children assembled in front of the altar and beautifully sang the carols.

Sister Upasana was also standing besides them holding little Anjali in her arms. Cecelia and Cycril were very much taken up by their performance, but what captured their hearts was the little infant sleeping blissfully.

I looked up and saw their faces. Their gaze was fixed only on the small infant. Many a times I had mentioned to Cecelia the option of going for an adoption; though she was never in complete denial, was a bit hesitant. Several times , I had tried to convince her that adopting an orphan child was very much a noble deed .

This moment was very precious to them. They knew exactly what was God’s plan for them. As both of them fully understood what they felt, they could not wait to speak out their mind to each other. After the mass ,they both hugged each other wishing a Merry Christmas. But this time it wasn’t an ordinary Christmas for them .It was filled with a new hope, new joy and new life. And I … I was just too happy for them..

The very next day they approached Sister Upasana and expressed their great desire to adopt little baby Anjali.

The adoption procedure was not so easy. Submitting numberless documents, validating the parents ability, their capability to look after the child… the list was endless. They were explained all the legal aspects of adoption and all the rules and regulations they had to abide by. But Cycril and Cecelia went through all this with utmost patience and perseverance. The joy of having little Anjali was much , much more than all this trouble.

Anjali.. they fell in love even with her beautiful name . It was indeed an God’s offering to them and their offering to God.

I have seen Anjali growing up from a small infant to a little girl. The care, the love and the adulation she gets from Cecelia and Cycril is just unbelievable. She means everything to them and they don’t have anything beyond her world. She is their richest possession and their priceless legacy. Now its 15 long years since Anjali has come into their life and their world.

Anjali knows about her life and that of her foster parents. Cecelia and Cycril were too frightened to tell her about her being adopted. But slowly and gradually they told her the truth before her sixth birthday. I still remember how apprehensive they were of losing her, would she continue loving them as before? Would she trust them? Confide in them ?Hundreds of questions troubled their minds. I was the silent witness of everything they went through. Sometimes we simply need someone who will be there for us, someone who will sit there and listen, some one who is genuinely concerned. I admired their great courage and composure. Realizing how precious she is in their life , gives Anjali a sense of immense joy and happiness. Her love towards them has grown deeper and stronger.

Now, as Anjali continued singing, they could clearly recall every moment of that beautiful night, when God had sent to them Anjali… a hope so real.. a joy so pure…. a love so true….

**Curie Pereira**