



COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

الكنيسة القبطية الأرثوذكسية

**DIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES**

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND HAWAII

أبرشية لوس أنجلوس، كاليفورنيا الجنوبية، وهاواي

## Our Father, the Metropolitan's Pastoral Message for the Glorious Feast of the Nativity 2019

*"Rejoice in the Lord always" (Php 4:4)*

My Beloved, the Blessed Children of the Holy Church,

It is my pleasure to wish all of you a blessed Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. We rejoice in the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, Who has manifested to us the mystery of God's humility, love, and He constantly seeks our salvation. St. Paul the Apostle explained that the Word, the Son of God, "Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Php 2: 6-8). This explains to us the amazing divine love, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16).

When we joyfully come to worship the Babe of Bethlehem, let us remember that we are worshipping our Lord, Who emptied Himself and accepted to take our human nature. He came to our world, and lived amongst us, so He can save us, for "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). We, who were sitting in the darkness and the shadow of death, He shined upon us with His light, as it is written, "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned" (Mt 4:16).

The mystery of the Incarnation is the mystery of God's wondrous humility. As Satan enticed man to fall through pride and disobedience, Christ saved us through His humility and obedience unto death on the cross.

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Our joy in the birth of Christ is fulfilled, when we live with humility. This is why St. Paul exhorted the Philippians, as well as, all of us and said, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Php 2:5).

When we have “the mind of Christ” (1 Co 2:16), we will also have one mind and will fulfill what St. Paul’s said, “being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Php 2:2-4).

We rejoice in the birth of Christ, because He came to grant us a new life, which St. Paul conveyed by saying, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Php 1:21). Additionally, he said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Ga 2:20). This new life is characterized by holiness, because “as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pe 1:15).

We live this new life, not for ourselves, but for Christ’s sake, because, “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Co 5:15). The goal of this new life is to glorify God, “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Co 6:20).. It is a new life that liberates us from slavery to other people, as St. Paul wrote, “You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men” (1 Co 7:23). It is a new life that liberates us from slavery to sin, since “whoever commits sin is a slave of sin... Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (Jn 8: 34, 36). We live this new life on earth, but our goal is heaven, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Php 3:20)..

The birth of Christ grants joy in our spiritual struggle, because Christ gave us salvation and opened to us the door of Paradise. Thus, we should act according to the divine calling, as St. Paul said, “Let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Php 1:27) and “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Php 2:12). St. Paul set an example for us by saying, “I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Php 3:13-14). St. Paul assures us that we are not alone in our struggle, because, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Php 2:13).

Let us all rejoice in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, The Babe of Bethlehem, Who emptied Himself for our salvation, granted us the life of holiness and true freedom, and leads us in His triumphal procession.

Let us pray for the peace of the Holy Church and our beloved Father, H.H. Pope Tawadros II.

Let us pray for every struggling and suffering soul so that the Babe of Bethlehem may shine upon her with the light of victory and eternal joy.

Let us pray for the families of our Martyrs of El Menia and St Samuel Monastery that the Lord grant them peace and comfort and pray for the full and speed recovery of the wounded

Let us rejoice, because the Lord is near. May Emmanuel our Lord shine with His peace in our hearts and keep our thoughts in Him.

Wishing you many happy returns.

Metropolitan Serapion