

Christmas message 2019

Jesus, the divine Infant is born this day in Bethlehem. The Son of God came down from the highest to visit us. He is born in a cave, in utmost poverty, because he did not want to come in his glory. He is incarnate not in order to dominate the world, but to bring new life to our hearts. He came to show us that love is what matters and what remains. This is why he came as the poorest among the poor and the last among the last.

Born of the Virgin Mary, God does not want to force us to love him; it is not his intention. What he wants is to convince us to love him. Not that we would love him on some conditions, but totally, fully, disinterestedly. He in his turn offers us his unbounded love. That is why Jesus was born: The Son of God became man as we are to bridge the immeasurable gap that divides God from man.

That is why, when we become estranged from God, we are estranged from all the basic values of life. That is why every step we take on our way to return to God is important. The feast of Nativity offers us a unique opportunity to plunge with all our being into the mystery of divine love, without which the mystery of man cannot be possible nor visible. God, becoming man, clothes himself with our poor flesh in order to enrich it with his divinity. He comes among us not to demand us reckoning of our deeds, but to save us from the disasters and distress of our existence. He comes not in order to use us to increase his glory, but to ask us to accept the salvation he has brought. Jesus says, "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49). This fire is reconciliation and forgiveness. Truly, Christ did not come among us to judge, but to save.

As St. Gregory the Theologian aptly says, the Nativity is as a true earthquake that from the center of earth spreads tremors of divine economy of salvation to all the world. That is why this day is considered the birthday of all humanity, the feast of all creation. As St. Basil the Great says, the Word of God descends to us in order to let the whole world come to fullness by his abasement. The mystery of the birth of Christ is the greatness of humility, richness in poverty and freedom in obedience to those who would accept them. In one word, by his Nativity Christ comes to those the humble in heart, because they let themselves to be guided to venerate his manger. This is what happens in the heart of every genuine seeker of truth: he will see the miracle of stepping from the dark to light by the birth of Our Lord. This miracle cannot leave us indifferent towards God or our brothers. Communion with God comprises the communion with fellow men, and this in turn reflects our love for God.

Some may ask impudently: How to explain the incarnation of God rationally? But faith is not just sentiment; it is ascent to a mystery that human logic and reason cannot explain. Those who doubt Truth or deny it can have no communion with it. They try to diminish the incarnation of God on earth; they act blindly and childishly. Their denial of God is not based on facts that follow from Truth but from a misuse of freedom, because God compels no one. Some even understand the Nativity of Christ not as the infinite love of God towards man, but as the tragedy of man, personal suffering; this comes from the rejection of love.

The miracle of Nativity has no end. It surpasses our logic, our doubts, our self-sufficiency, the routine of our futile works. To take part in this miracle, we must change our mentality, to stop looking at everything through the prism of our egoism. This miracle is renewed every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, by which Christ is born in the heart of every faithful. The temple of God becomes the cave of Bethlehem and the altar becomes the manger. This it is whence the Word of God is distributed to all peoples.

May the light that shines from Bethlehem be a moment of communion with grace to each one who suffer: the poor, the sick, the prisoners and all who have no hope and all who are tired of living; to those, too, whom we forsake in our life through indifference or negligence. And may the New Year 2020, be a year of grace and blessing to all of us!

In Tallinn, Nativity of Our Lord 2019.

+ Stephanos,
Metropolitan of Tallinn and All Estonia