



IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD. AMEN.

My Beloved, Priests, Deacons, Servants, Members of Church Committees, and all the Congregation, grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let me be the first to congratulate you on this glorious feast that we celebrate today – a feast in which we celebrate the coming of the True Light into the darkness of the world.

You may never have noticed, but unlike the Lord's Resurrection – which was witnessed “very early” on a Sunday morning – the birth of Christ is only made evident at night, during times of darkness.

The first witnesses to Christ's birth were the shepherds. St. Luke tells us that the shepherds were minding their own business, **“keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2:8)**, when they met an angel of the Lord who proclaimed to them the good news of their Savior's birth. Thus, they found Christ at night, in darkness.

The other witnesses were the wise men who came from the East. They were led to the manger by a bright star, which they followed **“till it came and stood over where the young Child was” (Matthew 2:9)**. And since stars are only visible at night, it is safe to assume they came to Christ in the darkness of night as well.

My beloved, it is a truly a beautiful thing for us to meditate on – that Christ revealed Himself to the world at night, in darkness.

It was dark in the sense that it had been nearly 400 years since God had spoken to His people – 400 years since a prophet had come to proclaim the Word of God. That's four or five generations that hadn't heard from God or seen His Presence manifested among His children. That is darkness.

It was also dark in the sense that the children of God were under oppression from the Romans. No hope of being delivered. No hope of being saved. Darkness once again.

And it was also dark in the sense that even the chief priests and leaders of God's people had become, for the most part, corrupt. They taught the people to obey their own laws instead of the laws of God. They took advantage of the poor. They mistreated widows. They slayed the prophets and the righteous men of God. Darkness, darkness, darkness.

But it was in the midst of that darkness that the True Light came down and shone so brightly. And for that we should be thankful. Because just as the darkness of the world didn't stop Christ from coming to Bethlehem 2000 years ago, the darkness of today will not stop Him from coming to us as well.

Regardless of the darkness that may be in your life right now, the Incarnation brings light to all. As St. John the Evangelist writes, **“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” (John 1:4-5)**. Truly, there is no amount of darkness that cannot be overcome by the glorious Light of Christ.



St Gregory the Theologian says, “The light shines in the darkness... in order that we, putting away the darkness, may draw near to the Light and may then become... children of perfect Light.”

This is what we believe and, as we pray during the Matins Doxology, we sing:

O True Light, Who gives light,
To every man, that comes into the world.
You came into the world, through Your love for man,
And all the creation, rejoiced at Your coming.

St. John also said: ***“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5)***

Truly it is fitting for us to celebrate this glorious feast at night, in the dark. Because on this feast, we celebrate not only the birth of a child in Bethlehem; we celebrate the True Light shining down upon a world in darkness. As the prophet Isaiah proclaims: ***“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.” (Isaiah 9:2)***

In Micah chapter 7 verse 8 we read: ***“Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The Lord will be a light to me.”***

Regardless of where you are today or what may be going on in your life. Regardless of what darkness might be overtaking you and causing you to feel hopeless. Regardless of how little peace, love or joy you might be experiencing today. The fact remains: the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ eliminates any darkness, deepens and strengthens in us the virtues of love, peace and joy, as the Angels sang: ***“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14)***

You only have to approach this Light to be illuminated, as the Psalm says: ***“They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed.” (Ps 34:5)***

May God, the True Light, keep you all in His peace during this coming new year. And may He fill your lives with the light of His knowledge and His love as we celebrate the glorious feast of His Nativity. Through the intercessions and prayers of the Mother of Light, the holy Theotokos St. Mary, and all the choir of martyrs and saints who have pleased Him since the beginning, and the prayers of our holy Father and Shepherd His Holiness Pope Tawados II.

Merry Christmas!
BISHOP PETER

Bishop, Diocese of North, South Carolina & Kentucky
And Papal Vicar of the Churches of Virginia