



COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF NORTH, SOUTH CAROLINA & KENTUCKY

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, my sincerest congratulations to you all for this Glorious Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On this night, we celebrate not just a religious feast in the church, but also an event that transformed all of mankind: the Incarnation of the Divine Logos – that **“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.” (John 1:14)**

The reason for His Incarnation is simple: to save us from death and free us from the tyranny of sin. After the Fall of Adam, mankind was doomed to live under the sentence of death. As we say in the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil, **“In the last days you did manifest yourself to us, who were sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.”**

But through His glorious incarnation, mankind was restored once again, as “He granted us the birth from on high, through water and Spirit.” The True Light shone upon us and we were liberated from Satan’s tyranny, as we sang repeatedly this past month in the hymn of the Burning Bush,

“He saved Adam and his children, and cured him from the serpent’s venom, and returned his honor to him.”

In his famous book, *On the Incarnation*, our father St. Athanasius writes:

“Death has become like a tyrant who has been completely conquered by the legitimate monarch; bound hand and foot. The passers-by sneer at him, hitting him and abusing him, no longer afraid of his cruelty and rage, because of the king who has conquered him.”

But as great as the victory is, it’s not always easy to see. Many people are going through hard times these days and don’t feel very victorious at the moment. It seems like every day, I am approached by at least one person who tells me that they are going through an abnormally challenging time and they are wondering “where is God?”

Whether it’s at work or at home, whether it’s with family or with friends, whether it’s happening here in front of us or halfway across the world, there’s a lot of pain and suffering in the world and in our lives these days.

But that doesn’t mean that God isn’t working. That doesn’t mean God isn’t present, with us every step of the way.

HH Pope Shenouda III once spoke about some of the benefits that pain brings in our life. He said,

“Pain is the deepest thing in life; it purifies the heart. Pain purifies man more than 1000 sermons and more than reading 1000 books. One hour of suffering purifies the heart internally.”

As much as we hate to admit it, it’s usually in our pain and suffering that we feel God’s presence and see His activity the most.



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Jesus came into a world filled with darkness and extraordinary amounts of suffering. The people were under heavy oppression from the Romans. They were suffering financially due to excessively high taxes. There was corruption in the religious ranks and God hadn't sent a prophet for over 400 years. Pain and suffering were everywhere.

And when Jesus came, He didn't solve any of these problems. The people were still oppressed. They still suffered financially. The religious leaders were still corrupt. But what did change was that God was now in it with them. He didn't remove the darkness, but He shone His light within it, as it says in Matthew 4:16:

"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." (Matthew 4:16)

2000 years later, He is still here, shining His bright and glorious Light into a dark world – offering hope to those in need. But hope doesn't mean that we seek the removal of all trials and all pain from our lives; it means that despite all the darkness, the True Light is here and dwells among us. And with Him comes all the power of heaven – power to heal, and to forgive, and to bless, and to provide.

In other words, hope isn't the removal of all our problems but rather the freedom to live with Christ in the midst of them.

That is what tonight offers to us all.

Saint Pope Kyrillos VI once famously said, **"There are no bad days and good days, but there are days of prayer and days without prayer."**

The days of prayer are the days where we have hope – because those are the days where we are connected with our Lord Jesus Christ and we open a window for His Light to shine in our lives. But the days without prayer are the ones where we close our eyes to the Light and face the pain alone. Those are the days, my beloved that I pray we do our best to avoid.

May God bless us all and may He remind us that no matter how dark things may get, we are never alone because, as we sang earlier tonight in the doxology of the Nativity,

"Today the True Light, has shone upon us, from the Virgin Mary, the pure bride."

Once again, my congratulations to you all on the blessed Feast of the Nativity. May you never forget that no matter how dark things may seem, thanks to Christ's Glorious Incarnation into the world, we are never far from the True Light.

Through the never-ending intercessions of the Holy Theotokos, St. Mary, and all saints and through the prayers of our holy Father and Shepherd His Holiness Pope Tawadros II.

Merry Christmas to you all.

Bishop Peter

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