



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, grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ, who on this night, was born in Bethlehem for our salvation.

As we gather to celebrate this glorious Feast of the Nativity, let us once again remember and behold the mystery of divine love made manifest in the flesh.

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

In the little town of Bethlehem, heaven and earth meet; the infinite humbles Himself, taking the form of a servant, that humanity might know the boundless depths of God's love. As such, let us be sure that tonight is more than just a commemoration of a historical event; tonight is a call to enter into that same love which led to Christ's coming.

As St. Athanasius the Apostolic writes in his classic, *On The Incarnation*:

“For we were the purpose of his embodiment, and for our salvation he so loved human beings as to come to be and appear in a human body.” (St. Athanasius the Apostolic)

Many today ask: What does it truly mean to be a Christian? Is the goal just to attend church, to fast, to pray, and to read the Bible?

While all of these practices are essential to building one's spiritual life, they are not the goal. They are a means to an end, but not the end itself. The goal of all Christian life is love—love of God and love of neighbor.

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31)

Our Lord came on a mission of love. He touched the leper, spoke to the sinner, and offered the Kingdom to the Gentiles. His love was not only theoretical but tangible—love that preached good news to the poor, healed the brokenhearted, and set the captives free. This is the same mission into which He sends us:

“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21).

Everything we do—our prayers, fasting, service, participation in the sacred mysteries— the value of these practices comes from their leading us into greater love for God and greater love for neighbor. Without love, our practices are nothing.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my



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goods to feed *the* poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

This is why our Lord's Incarnation challenges us. It is love in action. Christmas is not merely the story of God loving from afar, but of God coming near. He who holds the heavens was wrapped in swaddling clothes; He who sustains all creation was nourished at the breast of the Virgin. In that manger, divine love took on human weakness, sanctifying it.

As St. Gregory the Theologian writes:

“He is wrapped in poor swaddling clothes—but He looses the bonds of our sin. He lies in a manger—but He is worshiped by angels. He flees from Herod—but He delivers us from death.” (St. Gregory the Theologian)

The Word became flesh to show us that love is not an emotion, but a mission.

Yet how often do we struggle to love as Christ loves?

Some of us fail to love others because we have not yet learned to receive God's love for ourselves. We see only our sins, our failures, our unworthiness—and we imagine that God sees us the same way. But the message of Christmas declares the opposite:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3)

Think of a mother who bends down to wash her child. No matter how dirty the child becomes, her love never falters. So too does God bend down to us, washing the filth of our sins with His own blood. Nothing in us repels Him; nothing we do can make Him stop loving us.

“Like a handful of sand thrown into the great sea, so are the sins of the flesh in comparison with the mind of God. And just as a strongly flowing spring is not obscured by a handful of dust, so the mercy of the Creator is not stemmed by the vices of his creatures.” (St. Isaac the Syrian)

Therefore, my beloved, let us accept ourselves as God accepts us—not in pride, but in gratitude. For only when we receive His love can we freely give it.

At the same time, the love of self must never become self-centeredness. When love turns inward, it dies. Love is only real when it is shared.

“If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find Him in the chalice.” (St. John Chrysostom)

The Church Fathers often compared the soul to water: when it is still and closed in on itself, it becomes stagnant; but when it flows outward like a river, it brings life wherever it goes. So must we become rivers of divine love, receiving from God and pouring into the world around us.

So my beloved children, as we celebrate this glorious Feast of the Nativity, let us renew our participation in Christ's mission of love. The world today is filled with division, isolation, and fear. What it needs most is not arguments or debates, but incarnate love—love that listens, serves, forgives, and gives.



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“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35)

May the Light that shone from the manger illumine your homes, strengthen your families, and fill your hearts with the joy of His presence. May the peace of the newborn Christ dwell richly among you and make you instruments of His divine love in this world.

Through the intercessions of the pure Virgin, Mother of God and Mother of Light, St. Mary, and through the prayers of the blessed elder, St. Joseph the carpenter, 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

