



COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

الكنيسة القبطية الأرثوذكسية

DIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND HAWAII

أبرشية لوس أنجلوس، كاليفورنيا الجنوبية، وهاواي

Festal Message for the Feast of the Nativity 2021

“That the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Co 4:7)

My Beloved, the Blessed Children of the Holy Church,

Today, as we receive the Babe of Bethlehem, our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, our hearts are full of gladness. Therefore, let us rejoice and praise Him with the angels saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Lk 2:14).

The birth of Christ marks a new beginning for all mankind. The Son of God, the Word, was incarnate and took a full human nature with a rational soul, in order to raise us from our Fall, as well as free us from slavery to Satan and grant us a new nature. Thus, in the Friday Theotokion, we praise God saying, “He took what is ours and gave us what is His; we praise and glorify Him and exalt Him.”

The question is: What did Christ give us?

St. John the Apostle wrote, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 Jn 3:1). Additionally, he wrote “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (Jn 1:16). Also, St. Paul the Apostle expressed it in this way, “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you, Whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Co 6: 19-20).

God granted us the gift of sonship, and as His children, we are now able to address Him as “Our Father Who art in Heaven.” Also, He granted us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us, so that our bodies can become a temple for the Holy Spirit. Additionally, He granted us to partake of His Holy Body and Precious Blood, so that we may abide in Him and He in us. Thus, in the Monday Psali, we praise God for all these great gifts and say, “Around You stand the Cherubim and the Seraphim, and they cannot look at You. But we look at You every day on the altar, and we partake of Your Honorable Body and Blood.”

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God granted us this great treasure full of many gifts in earthen vessels. St. Paul wrote, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Co 4:7). The earthen vessel is our weak human nature. Usually when a person has a treasure, he protects it from abusing hands by placing it in a metal safe rather than an earthen safe. However, with the divine treasure, which was given to us through the Incarnation of the Son of God, the situation is different, because we are not the protectors of the treasure, but He is the One Who protects us.

We need to remember that although a person may receive many gifts, yet, he becomes weak when he faces troubles and difficulties. For example, St. Paul to whom our Lord Jesus Christ appeared several times, and was even caught up to the third heaven and heard inexpressible words, yet he wrote, “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God Who raises the dead” (2 Co 1: 8-9). Also, the great and fiery Prophet Elijah stood against the wicked King Ahab, rebuked him, and executed the prophets of Baal. But when the wicked Jezebel threatened him, he was afraid and ran for his life. He even asked to die, and said to God, “It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!” (1 Ki 19:4).

When we face trials or sufferings and become weak, we should neither be shaken, distressed, nor surprised. Indeed, we have a great treasure, nevertheless we are earthen vessels and the source of our strength is not us, but in God, as it is written, “the excellence of power may be of God and not of us” (2 Co 4:7). St. Paul explained that, “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Co 4: 8-9).

The painful circumstances may press hard and surround us from all aspects of our life, but we ask God to enlarge our hearts and enable us to bear the situation, because when the heart cannot bear the difficulty, it becomes more unbearable.

Tribulations perplex us and make us wonder, “Why did this happen?” or “Why did God allow this to happen?” and even say, “Where is the Benevolent God?” Yet, our incomprehension should not lead us to despair, because we have confidence in our Pantocrator and Beneficent God.

Thoughts may trouble us and Satan may persecute us, but God does not leave us, because He promised to be with us always.

As we face trials, we may be struck down, but through God’s power, we are not destroyed. Therefore, St. Paul said, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Co 4:17).

Let us rejoice, because God has granted us as His children a great treasure, and even if we are earthen vessels, yet the power of God works in us. “Therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (2 Co 4:16).

Let us pray that God grants us power, so we are not weakened by the trials we face, and our faith is not shaken during difficult times.

Let us pray for the peace of the Holy Church, the whole world, and our beloved Shepherd, HH Pope Tawadros II.

Let us pray for the souls of our beloved, who reposed, and for the healing of all the sick.

Let us pray that God may lift this pandemic from us and from the whole world.

Wishing you many happy returns.

Metropolitan Serapion