



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΦΡΑΓΚΙΣΚΟΥ

CHRISTMAS ENCYCLICAL 2017

*“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and his name shall be called Emmanuel” (which means ,God with us).
Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 7:14*

Dearly Beloved,

Amid the flurry of shopping, decorating, and parties, each of us can lose focus on the significance of the Nativity of Jesus Christ season for our life of faith. We can become overly sentimental about Christmas. We can forget the meaning of what happened in Bethlehem over two millennia ago.

The passage above from the Book of Isaiah repeated in the Gospel of Matthew, should jolt us to a new understanding: God is with us. God Himself has broken into the world and into our lives. We have seen the glorious light of God because **“God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5)**. Jesus Christ is this light. Jesus Christ is one with the Father. And today, we celebrate His Nativity in the Flesh as we call this Feast in the Church calendar.

The Nativity of Christ – the Incarnation – was necessary to rescue us from ourselves. As Saint Athanasios the Great taught, humanity had turned away from the true God and became less than what God created us to be. We had forgotten that each man and each woman is created in the image and likeness of the true God. This condition still exists in our world today, when we see the dehumanizing actions of our world towards one another, from trafficking and slavery, violence and abuse, to war and persecution, and the list goes on.

So, what was Our Creator to do? How could He renew the image of God in us? He became human Himself, in His Son, Jesus Christ. Saint Athanasios writes, **“The Word of God came in**

His own person, because it was He alone, the image of the Father, who could recreate man after the image.” In other words, God took on human flesh, because we needed God to do for us what we could not or would not do for ourselves. We did not turn to God, so God comes to us as the child born of Mary in Bethlehem this day.

In the Nativity, God *“Became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14)*. By taking human flesh and living in the world, Christ has shown us how we are to treat ourselves, our neighbor, the world around us, and how to be in communion with our Heavenly Father. That fellowship does not occur by downloading a podcast or reading a few nice books, as instructional as they might be for us. Christ has taught us that communion with God requires that we immerse ourselves in our Church community, amid other disciples of Christ. God is with us in our parishes. God is with us in the Liturgy, in Sacred Scripture, in our prayer and worship, and in Holy Communion. There we experience the glory of the Light of Christ.

Once we have seen the true Light of Christ, we can carry that light into the world. We actually are commanded to do so. Just as the angels – the messengers of God – shared the Good News that God is with us to the shepherds, we can share that same Good News with others. God is with us when we are with our families and friends. God is with us in our workplaces and in every action of our day, no matter how small it may seem. God is with us in our acts of charity and service that restore the dignity of those who suffer from the ills and injustices of the world, as Christ’s presence renewed the image of God in us all.

May the Light of the Nativity shine in your hearts, in your homes, and in all your days in this Holy Season of Light and in the coming New Year.

With Love in Our Newborn King,


✠ GERASIMOS
Metropolitan of San Francisco