

BISHOP HOVAKIM MANUKYAN
NATIVITY
JANUARY 5TH, 2018

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Քրիստոս ծնաւ եւ յայտնեցաւ,
Ձեզ եւ Մէզ մեծ Ավետիս,
Christ is born and revealed among us
Good tidings to all of us, Amen!

With the good tidings of Christ's birth, today I greet you all, gathered together in this beautiful Armenian Church to celebrate the Theophany and Epiphany of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is a great joy for us, because as St. John the Evangelist says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The mystery of the incarnation, as an act of the expression of God's infinite love towards mankind, is the beginning of reconciliation between mankind and God. Today, God became flesh; he came to this world and became one of us to help us to re-discover our likeness to God that human beings had lost because of their sins and transgressions. St. Athanasius the Great, a 4th century Church Father, says: "God became man (flesh) so that men might become God."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

How should we understand this theological message and how should we implement it into our own lives? The incarnation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is what the Armenian hymn-writer calls a "great and wonderful mystery." It is a simple account of the wonderful relationship between God and humanity. An old story helps us understand it better. It is said that once there was a flourishing monastery: the services were well attended and the congregation did not have any problems. However, things changed and everything started to go wrong. The abbot and the elderly started to think how to overcome the crisis and regain the former state of affairs. They started to pray and the abbot was advised to visit ancient monasteries of the East to pray with the holy monks and ask for their advice. The abbot made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and met a person who was known as a man of prayer and chastity. When the abbot entered the cell of the monk, he was asked, "Why have you come"? The abbot replied, "We are desperate as we have lost everything that we had and are afraid that our monastery will close". "I would like you to know the reason", the holy monk responded. "It is because of the sin of INDIFFERENCE." The abbot asked about the meaning of the sin of indifference as it is not a capital sin. The holy man replied that the Messiah had come to his monastery in disguise and yet, they had chosen to ignore him. The holy man then

closed his eyes and continued to pray. The abbot was upset but was not able to ask more questions and he returned home on journey spanning thousands of kilometres. While he travelled back, he thought about who this Messiah could be. Brother treasurer? No, he was too sinful. Perhaps brother master of ceremonies? No, he was too arrogant. Brother chef? No, he was too ugly. He returned and told the story to his fellow monks. After a while, everybody started to suspect that the other might be the Messiah in disguise. This fact helped them to treat each other with respect, love and compassion. Soon after, the monastery once again became a flourishing place of worship and prayer with many believers.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Despite the oddities of our time, God can reveal himself in any human being who bears his image and likeness. It is about our own relationships and how we treat each other. God has set an example by sending his only begotten son to the world. It was an act of love. God wants us to be happy and to gain the happiness that every human being is longing for; he is not indifferent to us and we should not be indifferent to him and through him to each other. According to the Gospel of Mathew , when Jesus was asked “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ (Mt 22: 36-39).

There are two important lessons in the Biblical narrative of Jesus’s birth. When the wise men were seeking the place of the child, their faith led them with the help of the star of Bethlehem. But before finding Jesus they met king Herod asking him about the child who was born to be the King. Then they discovered Jesus as a child laying in the manger in a cave of shepherds. The first part of the narrative belongs to king Herod, which symbolises power and wealth, while the other one belongs to Jesus as a child, surrounded by family members, angels and shepherds. There are two contradicting stories: one of power, and the other of love, family, compassion and friendship. We also know that while the first one had a temporary advantage, the infant Jesus became victorious with the power of love.

We are starting our journey as Christians in the New Year and this is a journey of faith, love and hope. Let us pray to God to help us to see in each other the image of God who may visit us any time in disguise. Let us pray together that the heavenly graces and gifts of love of the Saviour’s Holy Nativity and Theophany increase in the world, leading all of humanity to the desired paths of goodness, justice and reconciliation, especially in the Middle East where children, unprotected women and the elderly are in need of peace and protection.

May you all be blessed by God’s grace and I pray to Jesus incarnate and beseech for the blessings of the Saviour, to renew us with the tiding of the Holy Nativity.

Great tidings to all of us:
Christ is Born and Revealed
Blessed is Christ’s Revelation!