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## A Christmas gift - Photo journal from Bethlehem



The greatest gift God has made to people is the possibility of union with Him. This gift has become concrete through the incarnation of God, through the birth of Jesus Christ.



Beyond this gift, however, when we celebrate the Nativity of the Lord (and on other occasions), God gives many other signs of His infinite love and kindness.

In the United States, in a mountain parish, there was no priest and the faithful asked the diocese to send them a priest so they could have a liturgy for Christmas. The diocese replied, "Yes, of course" but, after some time, when they were asked again, they still did not have time to deal with the parish's request. Of course, when asked again, the diocese said, "Okay, we'll deal with the situation." But after a time when they were asked again, no one was found to give a solution. The faithful also prayed warmly to God and to those who should have helped them, but no one came on the morning of the eve of Nativity. People were very upset that they would not have a liturgy for that Christmas.

But, lo and behold, on the morning of Christmas, an Archbishop with a very noble behavior celebrated for the people an Archieratic liturgy of a heavenly beauty. Deeply impressed, the people wept and asked the Archbishop to stay with them and be served a treat. The metropolitan politely refused and the people, in their simplicity, asked him to at least tell them his name and where he came from. The Metropolitan replied with a smile, "Nektarios. Come to Aegina to see me."



People searched for where Aegina is and, when they learned that it is an island in southern Greece, they started to raise money and form an official delegation to go to Aegina to thank the Archbishop.

The following summer, the most prominent members of the community went with gifts to Aegina to find the Archbishop Nektarios to thank them.

When they got off the boat, they asked a passerby, “I beg your pardon . . . Nektarios??” The passerby calmly showed them, “Yes, up at the monastery.” They went up the hill and came to the monastery and asked the nun from the gate, “Nektarios!” To which she replied, “Please go to the church!” People went excitedly to the church, expecting to find Nektarios there—but the church was empty. Believing that Nektarios would come at some point and, having nothing else to do, they began to worship in the church.

When they reached the area of the relics of the saint, they recognized him from the icon and began to cry like little children. The nuns ran, asked them what was going on—and so, I learned this story from them.

No one can make gifts as God and his saints do, only to have faith and be open to them.

In the pictures, a photo report of a Divine Liturgy served at Bethlehem.

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