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## 2019 Christmas Reflection of Metropolitan Methodios



M e r r y C h r i s t m a s! Every year we exchange this greeting, wishing that we all have a “merry Christmas”. What we mean and what we think by these words is like a picture taken from the perfect Christmas card: sentimental caroling, sugar plums, mistletoes, and the presents wrapped under the tree. In other words, a Christmas that is more about us than it is about Christ.



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON  
ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΒΟΣΤΩΝΗΣ

CHRISTMAS REFLECTION  
2019

*Merry Christmas!* Every year we exchange this greeting, wishing that we all have a “merry Christmas”. What we mean and what we think by these words is like a picture taken from the perfect Christmas card: sentimental caroling, sugar plums, mistletoes, and the presents wrapped under the tree. In other words, a Christmas that is more about us than it is about Christ.

Yet, the merriment of Christmas is hardly justified in the accounts of the Gospels. It is hardly a “merry” Christmas when a pregnant maiden has no place to give birth to her son (Lk. 2:7); where the shepherds are struck by fear (Lk. 2:10); when no sooner is the baby born that both He and His mother are forced to flee the country for a foreign land because they are persecuted by a furious despot (Mt. 2:13). It is hardly a “merry” Christmas when a multitude of innocent children of the age of two and younger are unjustly slaughtered by the merciless orders of the king (Mt. 2:16).

We are so accustomed to bask in the light of the Christmas star that we overlook the darkness of the cave. We are so accustomed to the glorious song of the heavenly hosts that we turn a deaf ear to the wailing and the weeping of those mothers who lost their newborn babies. Together with the glad tidings there is darkness, agony, fear, and despair in the Christmas story. Such feelings and emotions belong to the human condition as well. He who willingly became man—who became like us in all things except sin—could not have avoided them. To be fully human—for this is the mystery of the Incarnation—necessitates a descent to human pain and frailty. This descent begins with the Christmas cave and it is completed at Good Friday’s grave.



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Conversely, to follow Christ – to be Christ-like, to be a Christian – requires us to go through the same form of alienation from what is worldly even to the point of persecution as the ancient martyrs of the early Church testify, and as in our days so many of our brothers and sisters who suffer in the name of Christ.

Christ came to the world, to what is His own, “but His own did not receive Him” (Jn. 1:11). “The world did not recognize Him” (Jn. 1:10). So this “newborn King” begins his life as a foreigner, as an unwanted child, as a stranger among strangers. The exotic figures of the Magi (Mt. 2:11) and the flight to Egypt are only two examples of His *homelessness* which will become a hallmark of His earthly ministry. We hear Him in one instance saying: “foxes have dens and birds have nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (Lk. 9:58) Already at His birth, through His Babylonian guests and His Egyptian exile, Christ welcomes the nations and opens the mystery of humanity’s salvation to all people, apart from their race or religion. It is in this sense then—that is, to the extent that we see in the cave of Bethlehem a universal event that reverberates throughout history -- that the holiday greeting “Merry Christmas” assumes its proper meaning.

*Merry Christmas!*

+ Metropolitan Methodios of Boston