22/12/2020

Archdiocese of Thyateira & Great BritainChristmas Encyclical Letter

“Save the world, O Saviour. For this you have come. Set your whole universe aright”.

With the above words, Saint Romanos the Melodist introduces the last stanza of the famous Christmas kontakion. The lines are a supplication and an acknowledgement that the Lord will redeem humanity and save all creation. He Who was before all time heard the cries of humanity and came to save the world. It is this act of divine love that we remember and celebrate each year at Christmas.

The birth of Jesus the Christ was a moment in time when the course of our world was forever changed. Darkness was dispelled as the Sun of Righteousness shone, bringing hope to fallen humanity. Another hymnographer of our Church extolls us with certainty, “Christ is born, rejoice! And, we rejoice knowing that salvation has come to the world.”

This year, the joy of Christmas will be a different experience for many people, as

the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 virus have changed our usual patterns of life. The preparations and festivities that normally capture our attention this time of year will be dampened by worries and concerns for ourselves and our families, for the vulnerable members of our communities, for our health care workers and our civil leaders. The essence, however, and the meaning of this holy feast remain untouched and true for us in every way. Every year, it is our hope that the bright lights and beautiful trimmings will serve to inspire an understanding and recognition that we are entering into a time of grace and light, as we prepare to receive the light of Truth. But, this year especially when we perceive the darkness around us to have grown, we feel within our hearts an even stronger desire for the light that shows us the way to the Kingdom on high. As Isaiah prophesied, “For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given.” We know that child to be the light of the world, our Wonderful Counsellor, our Prince of Peace: Christ the Lord Himself.

Although this year we may have fewer people at our table when we sit down to celebrate the birth of our Lord, we are assured that wherever two or three are gathered in His name, Christ is there present, as is the fullness of our hope in Him. Christ is our ballast amidst the storms of this life and the message of salvation is not only a remembrance of an event some two thousand years ago, but a constant offering and outpouring of love, an invitation for Him to be born continuously in the hearts of people—as the Holy Fathers of the Church themselves experienced and passed down to us. Even if our experience of Christmas this year will undoubtedly be accompanied by a prayer that next year’s feast will be restored to its full joy, we know that the love of the eternal, the living Word of God is unchanging. So, on Christmas day, and on every day, let us bow our heads in gratitude to God for the many blessings He has given us, with the conviction that we have received what was promised and more, “since God had foreseen something better for us (Heb. 11:40)”.

Together, this Christmas let us pray for Christ to come and be born in our hearts, so that His grace, peace and love may abide in us, as we abide in Him. Not only this, but let us offer, together, a doxology to Him, for He Who is gentle and lowly in heart “will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up His voice, or make it heard in the street” (Isaiah 42:1-2). Indeed, He comes as an innocent child to bring a new and different understanding of life to the world. He comes to bring justice, harmony, love and peace to the hearts of all, to each and every person. And, through His presence and witness, “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord forever as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:9).

May all the joy, peace, and happiness of the Nativity be with you and all the world,

and may God lead us to the New Year 2021, filling it with every good and perfect gift which comes from the Father of Lights.

With paternal love and blessings,

+ Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain