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Christmas Message of His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Albania 2021: Peaceful Resilience – We Are Not Alone



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CHRISTMAS 2021

Peaceful Resilience – We Are Not Alone.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows” (Mt. 1:18)

In these festal days various thoughts, messages, and comments about peace, love, joy, and hope are often repeated. However, there is no shortage of those who prefer to dissociate these concepts from their basic core of the Nativity, and to vaguely call them “seasons greetings”. Nevertheless, the radiance from the redemptive Event of the coming of the Redeemer to humanity shines upon our afflicted earth.

Of the many rays of the Sun of Justice which shine forth, two these days acquire a special pertinence: the peaceful resilience of the of the key figures of the biblical narrative of the Nativity and primarily the core of the meaning of Christmas.

The particular circumstances, in which the Son and Word of God came into our world, were not comfortable. A few days before His birth, His mother was subjected to an arduous journey from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea. Arriving, no hospitable home opened their doors to them. The indifference of the inhabitants was glacial. Even at the inn “there was no room for them”. They took refuge in the stable and “wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger” (Luke 2:7). From the first moments, Jesus Christ refused the opulence and luxuries of this world. Before long, the occurrence of the manic outburst of Herod caused them to flee to a foreign land, to Egypt. Regardless, all of these unexpected difficulties and dangerous conditions were responded to with a peaceful resilience, suffused with patience, perseverance, serenity.

The Redeemer embraced the harsh reality of human life, facing, while yet an infant, poverty, exile, and persecution. This message is decisive for all of us who desire to follow in the footsteps of Christ: Peaceful resilience in the various ordeals that appear in our journey, in deprivations, in hardships, in sorrows. Peaceful resilience to unexpected hostilities, slanders, and persecutions. Peaceful resilience along the trying paths of foreign lands. This does not mean apathy. In fulfilling His redemptive mission, the “gentle and humble” Jesus resisted injustice and ritualism. He contended with the powerful and denounced duplicity, always with peaceful resilience. Even in the most extreme situations, throughout the awful Passions.

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The great feast of Christmas defines the foundation of this resilience. The feast strengthens the certainty that with the coming of the Redeemer, we are not alone, that the Son and Word of God came to stay with us. “Emanuel” is one of His primary names, that is to say “God is with us”. Traces from the quest for the Transcendental, the Supreme Power of the Universe, are found in various cultures.

But what makes the Christian message unique is that God Himself became human. Two basic Patristic phrases summarize the meaning of the feast: “He became human that we might become deified” accentuates Saint Athanasios while Basil the Great emphasizes that the Son of God came to earth that He might “restore all humanity to Himself”. The infinite God took on human nature, that he might guide us to the ultimate development and perfection, to deification by grace. The union of the divine and human nature in Christ gave humanity a new dynamic and elevated it amidst the light of the uncreated divine energies, which His love radiates.

In this joyful feast, our Church calls us to not only praise the Coming Lord, but to strengthen our faith in His continuous presence, within the history of the world – and our own – with heartfelt prayer and through our participation in the life-giving sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

Many believe only in the historical Jesus Christ, a figure of the past. They do not believe in the eternally present Lord. The Christian faith insists that Christ is always with us, not only in the times of devotion and peace, but also in the days containing sorrow, doubt, cowardice, insecurity, and trials, which are propagated by this unprecedented pandemic. The awareness of the presence of the Lord Jesus inspires, comforts, and strengthens the certainty that God will ultimately intervene at the appropriate moment, when and as He judges.

But, for those of us who believe, it is not enough to feel that we are not alone. We ought to ensure that the divine presence is felt by those whom we encounter – through words, deeds, and the witness of our lives.

Our most beautiful Christmas gift, my brothers and sisters, for ourselves and for those around us, is to strengthen our faith that the God of truth, love, and power is with us. May the Incarnate Son and Word of God guide our thoughts and our actions, that we may face the small and great problems of our lives, with peaceful resilience.

A Blessed Christmas and New Year with steadfast health and a continual awareness of His presence.