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# THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

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**Bishop Youssef**

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

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## **His Holiness Pope Shenouda III**

117<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch  
of the See of St. Mark

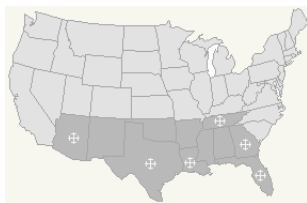


## ABOUT THE DIOCESE

*H*is Holiness Pope Shenouda III is the 116 Successor of St. Mark the Evangelist. His Holiness' era is marked by a remarkable growth in the number of Coptic churches abroad. To address the needs of these churches, His Holiness felt the urgency to establish dioceses abroad. Thus the first Coptic Orthodox Diocese to be established in the United States is the Diocese of the Southern United States in 1993. H.H. Pope Shenouda III appointed His Grace Bishop Youssef to oversee this Diocese.

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States is composed of the following states:

- \* Alabama
- \* Arizona
- \* Arkansas
- \* Florida
- \* Georgia
- \* Louisiana
- \* Mississippi
- \* New Mexico
- \* Oklahoma
- \* Tennessee
- \* Texas



There are currently 33 priests serving the 27 churches,  
and 26 Coptic communities located in the Diocese.

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# THE GENEALOGY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

**S**ociety in Biblical times was organized along family and tribal lines. Genealogy was of importance in establishing a person's lineage. Religious importance was determined by whom your forefathers were. For example, only the descendants of Aaron could become priests (Exodus 28:1). Temple officials had to examine extensively the genealogy of those presented for the priesthood. Old Testament genealogies also reminded the Israelites of their history as the chosen people of God.

Genealogies in the Holy Bible are not meant to be an exact detailed lineage of birth nor are they always complete. For example, the list of Aaron's descendants in the Holy Book of I Chronicles 6:3-15 includes names that do not appear in Aaron's genealogy in the Holy Book of

Ezra (Ezra 7: 1-5). Genealogies are thought to primarily establish a family's link with the past.

*“And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image”* (Genesis 5:3)

There are only two genealogies in the New Testament. The Holy Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke trace the ancestry of the Lord Jesus Christ back to Abraham and Adam, respectively. Though both genealogies are not exactly alike, the ancestries were included in the Holy Gospels to emphasize that the Lord Jesus was a son of King David, which was the necessary lineage for the Messiah.

Both of the Holy Gospels show the distinction of the birth of the Newborn Lord Jesus. St. Matthew in his Holy Gospel emphasizes the Lord Jesus' royal lineage, listing kings in the House of David among his forebears and telling of a miraculous star that proclaimed the coming of a new *“King of the Jews”* (Matthew 2:2). St. Matthew also introduced *“Wise men from the East”* (Matthew 2:1) that recognized the significance of the star's meaning and brought unto the Newborn Lord gifts of gold,

frankincense, and myrrh.

The message of the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew is very straightforward. The Lord Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah of biblical prophecy. The Lord Jesus Christ has been born with the purpose of leading all humanity toward salvation.

St. Luke emphasized the humility of the Newborn Lord Jesus Christ. The Newborn Lord was born within lowly surroundings, a cave in the hills around Bethlehem where domestic animals were kept at night. This is where His divinity was manifested. The infant Lord Jesus' first bed was in an animal-feeding trough. His holy birth is announced neither to kings nor priests but to shepherds in the field. This is truly the Lamb of God and the True Shepherd born to lead His people.

In the Holy Gospel of St. Luke we can understand the people and events that occurred during the time of birth and early life of the Lord. It is through the humanitarian aspects of the Holy Gospel of St. Luke that we see the Lord Jesus Christ's concern for the sinner and the outcast, the poor, and the sick as well as for women. St. Luke further traces the ancestry of the Lord Jesus Christ through the non-royal descendants of King David.

*“Don’t be afraid, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. Which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you; You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men”* (Luke 2:10-14).

The Holy Gospel of St. Luke is unique in its depiction of the Lord’s birth. Perhaps this can be attributed to the growing lack of faith in the Christian communities resulting from their belief that the promised return of the Messiah had been delayed. Writing in Southern Greece primarily for Gentile converts to Christianity, St. Luke emphasizes the universal significance of the Holy Gospel for all mankind not only for the Jews.

Further, the other Holy Gospels called upon the immediacy of the Kingdom of God, while St. Luke writes of the Lord Jesus Christ beginning His holy ministry not by announcing the imminent coming of the Kingdom of Heaven but by the presence of the Holy Spirit working

through Him (Luke 4:14).

St. Luke emulated the humbleness of the Lord Jesus Christ in a manner considered worthy of the One born to redeem mankind. St. Luke details the Lord Jesus Christ's concern and love for sinners with the confident hope of their repentance and forgiveness.

Both the Holy Gospels described how a virgin, St. Mary, betrothed to St. Joseph, mysteriously conceived the Lord Jesus Christ. They further detail how the Holy Infant was born in Bethlehem as a descendant of King David. Both Holy Gospel writers also show the Newborn Lord as the preexistent Son of God. Further, it is definitely emphasized that all this occurred in fulfillment of the ancient prophecies.

Although many often think of the town of Bethlehem as small, but it is definitely not insignificant. Bethlehem is known as the burial place of Jacob's wife Rachel, the birthplace of King David and above all the birthplace of the Messiah.

The genealogies differ in that St. Matthew derives the Davidic ancestry through King Solomon, son of David, while St. Luke traces the Davidic descent through

another son of David, Nathan. St. Luke's genealogy goes beyond Abraham, the Father of all Nations, to Adam to emphasize the Lord's unity with the entire human race (Luke 3:38).

St. Luke describes St. Joseph as the son of Heli (Luke 3:23). St. Matthew states that Jacob begot Joseph (Matthew 1:16). Is there a conflict in the Holy Gospel writing here?

In the Holy Book of Deuteronomy 25:5-6 there is mention of a law that states that the brother of a man who died without a child should marry the wife of the deceased and raise up an heir for his brother. The most probable explanation for these two verses is that Jacob and Heli were born of the same mother, but to two different fathers. When Heli died following a barren marriage his brother Jacob married the widow he left behind, who then became the mother of St. Joseph.

Virtually everything that is known about the life of the Lord Jesus Christ comes from only four documents, the Holy Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. These Holy Gospels are full of information and insight into the Lord's Holy life. The Lord Jesus Christ can be seen growing and abiding in the Spirit. From walking

in the wilderness, telling of parables, of challenges with the devil, performing miracles, and facing His opponents, we can view the Lord Jesus Christ's life from His Holy birth.

The Holy Gospels were not meant to provide a detailed description of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Gospels do not describe His appearance; tell of His education, nor of His psychological development. The Gospels are meant to portray Him as an icon does a saint. We identify with the Lord Jesus Christ through His sayings and teachings. The Holy Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke tell us all that we need to know of the early life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

No matter how wise or smart we may think we are, no matter how much knowledge we acquire, or experienced we become, we will never be able to fully understand everything about Heaven, mankind, or the universe in which we live. God has hidden the great mysteries of His wisdom from all of us, particularly those of us who believe themselves to be wise and educated. Instead only He can choose to whom He will reveal the truths of Biblical life, how we should live, and how to gain wisdom.

I pray that with the renewal surrounding the Glorious

Feast of the Nativity that we will all have the faith filled openness of St. Mary and her “Yes” to the archangel Gabriel. We will be inspired to read the Holy Bible and allow the Lord Jesus Christ to direct every thought, word, and action of our lives.

May we have the simple faith of a Small Child and keep our Christian heritage ever before us.

*Bishop Youssef*

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the  
Southern United States



## JUSTIFICATION OF HONOR AND TRUTH

*The* Glorious Nativity is the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ; the Word becoming human with a physical body and rational soul to dwell among us. Through this incarnated birth Pure Honor was manifested: an honor of loving kindness, an honor of humbleness, and an honor of courageousness in communion with God was given unto us “*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His Kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that*

*time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this*" (Isaiah 9: 6, 7); an honor not sought out, nor claimed through birthright, but one born out of purity.

*"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel"* (Matthew 2: 6).

When the wise men from afar asked King Herod, the great King of Judah, where the newborn King of the Jews was, neither Herod nor his chief priests including the high priest himself had any knowledge that the Messiah had been born. Although the scribes had certainly been aware through prophecies that the Messiah was to be born and had known where this birth would take place, yet they themselves were not privileged to the actual birth's occurrence. It is thus apparent that those of earthly honor are not allowed to honor the Christ Child's birth. On the other hand, the wise men of non-Judean descent and the lowly, poor shepherds in nearby fields tending their sheep were the only ones informed of the

extraordinary Heavenly birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only were they told of the event but were allowed to actually honor the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ themselves. It is through the vale of “*noble and good hearts*” (Luke 8: 15) that these men were allowed to honor the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Melito the Bishop of Sardis* in Asia (c. 170) and a recognized early church father sums up the Glorious Nativity beautifully as he writes,



Though the Son was incorporeal, He formed for Himself a human body after our fashion. He appeared as one of the sheep; yet, He still remained the shepherd. He was esteemed a servant; yet He did not renounce the Sonship. He was carried in the womb of Mary, yet arrayed in the nature of His Father. He walked upon the earth, yet He filled Heaven. He appeared as an infant, yet He did not discard the eternity of His nature. He was invested with a body, but it did not circumscribe the unmixed simplicity of His Divinity. He needed sustenance inasmuch as He was born a man;

yet He did not cease to feed the entire world inasmuch as He is God. He put on the likeness of a servant while not impairing the likeness of His Father”.



*St. John Saba*, the Spiritual Elder, also details the Glorious Nativity heartfelt through his prayer.



“You were born in my image in order to give birth to me Your image. You were born in a cave like those who have no home or a place to go to, while You are the Creator of Heaven and earth, and the Refuge of all the world. You were wrapped in rags and laid on the dust in the manger like the poorest in this world and You are the source of wealth and the pride of life. They carried You as a Child and escaped from an unjust person, and You are the Haven of the tired and the Refuge for the escapee...”



Why did the Lord Jesus Christ not assume in entirety the honor and glory that were due Him as the Lord and

Creator of all? Would not an easy life and one lived and enjoyed to its fullest have been a better choice? The answer is certainly evident in the way He had chosen to be born and to live His earthly life. He knew before hand that His spiritual life was more important and definitely more everlasting. The devil would come to show the Lord Jesus Christ the world “in a moment of time” and all its earthly treasures but the Lord was not tempted; as He desired a life everlasting not one lived in a short time span.



Why was the Lord Jesus Christ not born into a life of earthly prestige? Perhaps He did not desire anything earthly because He had a full knowledge of the Heavenly life. The Heavenly life, a spiritual life of everlasting destiny, was preferred to an earthly time constrained one, the earthly honors of which counted for nothing in Heaven.

As demonstrated by the Lord Jesus Christ’s life on earth, a lot of perils and dangers will threaten those who seek to live a spiritual life away from fame, glory and honor. Such perils threatened the very existence of the Lord Jesus Christ from the very beginning.

Immediately after He had been born, King Herod, the great King of Judah, massacred a lot of children in

order to ensure eliminating the One whom he feared would take his position of honor as “king” away from him (Matthew 2). It is true that many Jews at the time of the Lord Jesus Christ believed in Him and the essence of His message; but *“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the Praise of men more than the Praise of God”* (John 12: 42, 43).

*St. Eronimos* explained this point further by saying.

 “It is very difficult for a person to enjoy present and future earthly benefits (honors) and to go from temporary to the permanent everlasting joys and to expect to be honored here and there”. 

Illustrated by our Lord’s holy example, we will encounter pure honor and truth in the Lord’s Words to *Pilate*: *“Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are you a king then?’ Jesus answered ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born and for this*

*cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice”* (John 18: 37).

When asked by Pilate to verify the truth about himself whether He was born a king, the Lord Jesus Christ admitted with purity of honor. However, He did not do so overtly in order not to usurp Pilate’s authority, nor bring him down on his knees in fear and worship of Him. We know He was certainly capable of making Pilate do so. Our Lord Jesus Christ brings the truth to Pilate with pure honor. Thus out of Pilate’s mouth came the confirming words that Christ was and is the king.

However, in the midst of this particular situation, while the Lord spoke the truth, earthly honor kept Pilate from releasing the innocent and detained him from standing up for what was right. While Pilate condemned the Lord Jesus Christ, he also sought His release having been well convinced of His righteousness. Yet to his discredit, he was afraid of losing his earthly position (John 19: 12, 13).

The very wise Sirach said, *“Do not ask the Lord for high office or the king for preferment”* (Sirach 7: 4)

thus confirming that during this Old testament era, titles, positions, and wealth were considered to be ephemeral, of this world and trivial for Heavenly advancement. With his example, our Lord Jesus Christ proved it to be so.

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1: 14).

Through the Glorious Nativity, Truth has been exemplified; through the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, Love has been manifested; and in the keeping of His promises, His faithfulness has been proven. Through His example, His Holy Word has been taught; His Covenant has been established; His precious gifts have been bestowed; and the everlasting salvation has been guaranteed to those who abide in His Truth.

*“... But grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”* (John 1: 17).

The Glorious Nativity gave birth to the incarnate Son



of God and within this Immaculate Conception; birth was also given to purity of honor and truth for the righteous. Years later St. Paul would instruct, “*Knowledge puffs up (seeking honor), but love (the truth) edifies*”

(1 Corinthians 8: 1).

One Word would suffice to summarize honor and truth fully and succinctly. “Love” would be that most eloquent and expressive one. St. John the apostle, widely recognized for his great love for the Lord Jesus Christ, conveyed this truth in his preaching, his sermons, his Epistles and His Holy Gospel. When St. John became old and unable to preach, he would be carried to the church and placed among the believers to whom he would say, “My children love one another”. He believed this was the ultimate message and tenet brought forth from the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. That honor and truth summed up in the one word was sufficient to take our Lord to the Cross for our salvation.

Contemplating the life that sprang forth from the Glorious Nativity, *St. Pachomius* retrospectively said:



"If somebody honors you, let not your heart rejoice, but lament. Paul and Barnabas, when people honored them, they tore off their clothes, and Peter and the rest of the disciples when they were wrongly accused and were whipped, they rejoiced, because they were worthy to be abused for the sake of the Great Name".



The Lord Jesus Christ's holy birth has advanced the lives of infants, children, and youth who are pure in spirit and who do not seek honor at such an age. The Lord Jesus Christ's holy birth advanced the poor in spirit; those who do not seek earthly honors. Lord Jesus Christ's holy birth advanced the mistreated and abused of this world.

*St. Isaac the Syrian reiterated:*



"Whoever runs after honor, honor escapes him, and whoever escapes from it knowingly, it follows him and directs people to him".



So, with these golden words of St. Isaac and with the example given by our Lord Himself of Lazarus, the poor man, who “desired to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table” but ended up in Abraham’s bosom in Paradise; and of the rich man who had lived in richness and fame all his earthly life; but ended up yearning for a cool finger tip with which to cool his tongue burning in Hades (Luke 16: 19 - 31); let us all remember the Holy Glorious Honorable and Truth-seeking Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ in a manger, the intent of which has been to justify and confirm Honor and Truth. Glory be to God forever.





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## CHAPTER TWO

# PEACE ON EARTH

While we celebrate this New Year and the Glorious Feast of the Nativity, I would like each one of us to take measure of the amount of Peace that exists in our lives; the quiet times in which we allow our minds to reflect upon the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and recapture and live the Peace intended for us through this miraculous, divine event in today's world threatened with wars and rumors of impending wars. Is your life surrounded by the Peace of our Lord? Or does work entanglement, love of social life, competitiveness override your Peace; leaving little or no room at all for it; making the business of "getting ahead" precede Christ's Peace?

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was not born into peaceful times. Nor did His Holy Birth precipitate peaceful times upon the land. Born during a time for mandatory census, the jealousy of a king that precipitated

indiscriminate killing of male infants, and a time of ceaseless oppression for the poor; our Lord's birth did not manifest the Peace the Heavenly Host had proclaimed...

*“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”*

(Luke 2: 14).

“Peace on earth” promised Christ's Peace to those who were willing to love and obey God. The Peace brought to this earth was three dimensional:

- 1) Peace between God and man,
- 2) Peace between man and his brother, and
- 3) Peace between man and himself; primarily, peace wrought through reconciling humanity with God the Father, and people to each other through belief in and worship of One God.

While a belief in One God is of absolute necessity, it must be combined with a true worship and communion with One God. A true worship, not a “get to Divine Liturgy race before the Holy Bible is read, maybe I can fit in the Vespers after work, or I will not be able to stay for the Midnight Praises because I have plans early tomorrow”,

type of worship. This is the Feast of beginnings, a time to commit to that true worship.

Many early Christian beliefs, early church doctrines, and early Church congregations in particular, focused on the essence of One-God worship through an obedient love for the Lord Jesus Christ and abiding in peace. An excerpt from the teachings of Arnobius (c. 330) speaks to this obedient love and abiding in the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ...

An excerpt from the teachings of *Arnobius* (c. 330) speaks to this obedient love and abiding in the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ...



"You allege that those wars of which you speak were sparked because of hatred of our religion. However it would not be difficult to prove that After The Name Of Christ Was Heard in the world, wars were not increased. In fact, they actually diminished in great measure by the restraining of furious passions. The numerous hands of men as we are, we have learned from His teaching and His laws that evil should not

be repaid with evil. Rather, it is better to suffer wrong than to inflict it. We would rather shed our own blood that stains our hands and our conscience with that of another. As a result, an ungrateful world is now enjoying-and for a long period has enjoyed-a benefit from Christ. For by his means, the rage of savage ferocity has been softened and has begun to withhold hostile hands from the blood of a fellow creature. In fact, if all men without exception...would lend an ear for a while to His salutary and peaceful rules,...the whole world would be living in the most peaceful tranquility. The world would have turned the use of steel into more peaceful uses and would unite together in blessed harmony, maintaining inviolate the sanctity of treaties."



Why peace? Peace on earth was brought down to man so that man would know that he is the son of One God. If all men knew they were the sons of One God then there would be peace as the Prince of Peace came to seek and save the lost. The Lord Jesus Christ's mission was to establish peace.



*Lactanius* (c. 304-313) teaches us,



"If only God were worshipped, there would not be dissensions and wars. For men would know that they are the sons of One God...Why would the just and upright Godly man carry on war and mix himself with the passions of others when his mind is engaged in perpetual peace with men? Further, would he be delighted with foreign merchandise or with human blood-he who does not know how to seek gain? For the Christian is satisfied with his standard of living. He considers it unlawful not only to commit slaughter himself, but also to be present with those who do it."



*Lactanius* further exhorts,



"If desire is restrained, no one will use violence by land or by sea. No one will lead an army to carry off and lay waste the property of others...For what are the interests of our country but the detriments

of another state or nation? To extend the boundaries that are violently taken from others, to increase the power of the state, to improve the revenues-all of that things are not virtues. Rather they are the over throwing of virtues."



Peace had come down to earth in the form of an infant; the form of newness, in the beating of a pure heart, and the ultimate form of creation. A Peace one could lift one's eyes up to and see it declared from the Heavens. Indeed, one could feel that Peace in the midst of a humble birth, and in that humble birth anticipate eternity. This Peace was of a pure nature, everlasting, binding and comforting. The peacefulness of love from God the Father, in the form of an Infant Child was for then, now and forever.

*Cyprian* (c. 250) said,



"The One peaceful and trustworthy tranquility, the One solid, firm, and constant security is this: for a man to withdraw from this whirlpool of a distracting world and to lift his eyes from earth to Heaven, anchored on the ground of the harbor

of salvation... He who is actually greater than the world can crave nothing or desire nothing from the world. How stable, how free from all shocks is that safeguard. How Heavenly... to be loosed from the snares of this entangling world and to be purged from earthly dregs and be fitted for the light of eternal immortality."



At the presentation of the infant Lord Jesus in the temple, Simon the prophet, after seeing Him, knew with confidence that he could then depart in peace... *"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel"*

(Luke 2: 29-32).

May the Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ dwell within us all during this celebration of His glorious birth, and renew within us the desire to truly worship and glorify Him.

Bless the Lord all you nations, the tribes, and all

kinds of tongues, Praise Him and glorify Him above all forever.



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## CHAPTER THREE

# A BLESSED DECLARATION OF HOPE

**A**s we celebrate the divinely designed, heavenly orchestrated, glorious birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must remember that the birth of our Lord carries the same message today as it did more than 2000 years ago. That important, most meaningful message had brought and still brings good tidings and spreads great joy. In this hectic, complex world of today with its constant media barrage, unstable economic markets, political controversy and unending talks of wars and more wars, the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ most certainly brings a peaceful, calming, comfort and unending encouragement for hope. *“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever”* (Isaiah 40: 8).

The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is an affirmed and

confirmed declaration of hope. The coming forth of the Lord originated and instilled faith in nature, content within families and simple openness among people, thus establishing and blessing in Itself the promise of hope equally well to those present at the Lord's birth as well as to those of us generations later since the perfect fulfillment of the Law. The teachings the Lord Jesus Christ has brought to this world still stand today; His ancient yet modern messages offer solutions to present problems and answers to questions in all walks of life with the underlying declaration of goodwill toward men.

The angel announcing the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed. *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"* (Luke 2: 14).

*Irenaeus* (c.180) stated,



"The Lord Himself, who is Emmanuel from the virgin is the sign of our salvation. It was the Lord Himself who saved them, for they could not be saved by their own instrumentality."



Eternal salvation is hope. The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ conceived a hope that continues to dwell within us today. The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ created a hope that is eternal and everlasting.

*St. Clement* of Alexandria so eloquently addressed the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ,



"The apostolic Scripture speaks in this manner, 'after that, the kindness and love of God our Savior to man Appeared, not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us.' Behold the might of a New Song! It has made men out of stones and out of beasts! Furthermore, those who were as dead (since they were not partakers of the true life) have come to life again!" (c. 195).



*"Then the angel said to them... 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people'"*

(Luke 2: 10).

Because of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, St. Paul tells us in the Holy Book, II Corinthians 5: 1-10 that surely we will experience suffering in our earthly bodies but because of His blessed birth and willingness to come to earth we can look forward to a Heavenly Home, a Heavenly life, and a Heavenly body in Heaven. A great hope this is and one that can be attributed to the Glorious Nativity.

*“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (II Corinthians 4: 16-18).

In the Holy Book of Revelation (12: 1-2) we read of the greatness of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and from the Nativity, the birth not only of the Messiah but of the Church the birth brought about. *“Now a great sign appeared in Heaven; a woman*



*clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.”*

In this Holy Scripture we see a birth bringing hope, putting the great and wondrous signs together in concert to represent the perfect symbol of the Mother Church. Many Biblical scholars concur that the woman figuratively represents the Theotokos; the perfect symbol of our beloved Church, adorned with all the splendors this world can offer her blessedness. The garland of twelve stars could very well represent the twelve tribes of Israel or the twelve disciples. The moon under her feet symbolizes her role over creation by having given birth to the One True Son. This woman will bear other children as well which most scholars believe it to be a reference to new members added to the Church.

Such wonderful love, such amazing grace, such constancy of care, can only instill within each us of us a well spring of optimistic hope for the future which is as it was at the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ and as it should be today.

When we reflect upon the Glorious Feast of the Holy Nativity, we reflect on hope itself, which is eternal and permanent. Hope is for us now and for the future of those who believe in the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. At all times, past and present Hope has never been the end of all things but rather a new beginning of wonderful promises for those who love and obey the Lord.

Let us pray to the Incarnated Christ our God, the good, the long suffering, the abundant in mercy, who loves the righteous and has mercy on the sinners whom I am chief; who does not wish the death of the sinner but rather that he returns and lives, who calls all to salvation for the promise (THE HOPE) of the blessings to come.



## THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

*I*n the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, the Magi appear as “wise men” guided by a star from the East to Jerusalem where they sought out the new born King of the Jews. Coming from the East denotes the magi are outside of Israel. Scholars seem to think the Magi perhaps came from the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, where astronomy was cultivated early by the Chaldeans.

*“When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was”* (Matthew 2: 9).

The Israelites seem to have devoted little study to astronomy. Many Israelites, it is thought, believed the study of stars would encourage idolatry of star worship.

Therefore, there was no abundance of knowledge related to the study of stars among the Israelite culture. Regular patterns of travel of the stars and planets were sufficiently known to produce a calendar with the dates of holy days and festivals.

The star appearing in the days of Herod the Great of Judea (37-4BC) was a new star appearing for the first time. And only this one time did it appear. Frequently called “the Star of Bethlehem,” this star was definitely an unusual brilliant celestial body that captured the attention of those who followed it.

Bethlehem was a town some five or so miles south of Jerusalem. By the time of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, Bethlehem the once famous City of David, had become an obscure village. Bethlehem is first mentioned in the Holy Bible as being located near the burial place of Rachel and was called Ephrath (Genesis 35: 19). Bethlehem was the home of Boaz who married Ruth. It was home to Jesse, David’s father (I Samuel 16). It was prophesied in the Old Testament that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5: 2). Herod the Great’s priests reminded him of this prophecy and the wise men were sent to look for the Child in Bethlehem (Matthew 2: 1-8).

*Origen* the Scholar states,



"The star that was seen in the East we consider to have been a new star, unlike any of the other well-known planetary bodies Yet, it had the nature of those celestial bodies that appear at times, such as comets It has been observed that, on the occurrence of great events, and of mighty changes in earthly things, such stars are apt to appear, indicating either the removal of dynasties or the breaking out of wars There is a prophecy of Balaam recorded by Moses to this effect: 'There will arise a star out of Jacob, and a man will rise up out of Israel.'"



In the Old Testament Balaam was one of the Magi predecessors, a Gentile who also anticipated the coming of a King among the Jews.

Why would wise men follow this most famous star seeking to worship a King not from among their own religion but instead from among the Jews? The answer

may lie in the fact that the religion of the wise men was similar to the Jews. Originating from Persia, the magi believed in one God, did not worship idols, and worshiped light as symbolic of God. It was expected from the ancient of times that a great king would rise up out of the Jewish population. A child from Heaven would come who would restore the golden age to the Jewish nation. This expected child documented in ancient literature would take away all sin.

The prophet Daniel was a prince and chieftain among this particular class of magi or wise men. Through the Holy Book of Daniel, Daniel's prophecies and calculations of when the Lord Jesus Christ should be born were made known to the wise men that followed the star.

*Origen* stated the



"star was not any of the constellations existing in the sky that was made to be the star of the East. Rather, it was something of another order, appointed for this purpose and in the service of the knowledge of Jesus."



The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew further alludes to the Old Testament prophecy that “... *A star shall come out of Jacob, a scepter shall rise out of Israel*” (Numbers 24: 17). The reference to a star in ancient time signified a god or deified king.

What exactly did the Bethlehem star signify? It signified the extraordinary importance of the birth of the Christ Child. The star followed by the wise men was a sign of the Messiah Himself, signifying the true light He was certain to shed upon the world.

*“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him”*

(Matthew 2: 10-11).

*St. Ignatius* of the first century tells us regarding the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ,



“How, then was He manifested to the world? A star shone forth in Heaven above all the other stars.

The light from this star was inexpressible, and its uniqueness struck men with astonishment.”



The worship of the infant Lord Jesus Christ following His Holy birth by the Magi was symbolic of the Church. As it has often been said, the Church, the true Israel determines its membership by faith and not by ethnic lineage.

The wise men received knowledge of the newly born Lord Jesus Christ through observation of a star. It is interesting to note that the chief priests of the temple in Jerusalem including the high priest who alone can enter into the Holiest of All (Hebrew 9: 7) had no idea that the Messiah had been born and where. God in His infinite wisdom revealed His Truth to those with a noble and good heart earnestly seeking to worship Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ revealed by an astoundingly brilliant star that had appeared only one time from the East is our everlasting bright and morning star (Revelation 22: 16).

May the faith of the three who followed the star from the East abide in us all.







## CHAPTER FIVE

# WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM

**N**ow when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the King, behold, there came WISE MEN from the East to Jerusalem saying,

*“When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was”* (Matthew 2: 9).

The WISE MEN recognized and understood the meaning of the star. Their wisdom can be characterized as, *“the Sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times”* (1 Chronicles 12: 32). The quest of these wise

travelers began with a revelation from God and continued by God's providence. In wisdom they doffed their worldly concerns and allowed the Heavenly Father to lead them. As Noah, Abraham, Joseph, and Moses before them, they sensed God's leading and understood.

By faith, the WISE MEN followed the pointing star. By faith, the WISE MEN set out on a journey to pay homage to a newborn King. These educated men whose counsel was probably highly sought after, lived their life by faith. In the Gospel of St Matthew we are told, *"We have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him"* (Matthew 2: 2).

Obediently, the WISE MEN followed the star. God sent them a sign of the Messiah Himself, signifying the light He will shed upon the world. In ancient times a star signified a god, a deified king. The WISE MEN trusted in the Lord and followed the star into an uncertain direction. The WISE MEN obeyed the will of God. We are given a specific example of the obedience of the WISE MEN in (Matthew 2: 12), *"Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way."* Due to their

obedience we can assume that according to the Gospel of St. Matthew, these Wise Men were among the first to honor the infant Lord Jesus.

St. Matthew, writing for Jewish Christians, cites the Gentile WISE MEN as among the first worshippers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Coming to worship the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords we know the WISE MEN arrived unexpectedly. Yet, their gifts were significant of a newborn Savior.

*Gold*, represented the Christ Divine, the King of Kings. The Lord Jesus Christ laid aside His eternal wealth for His earthly ministry.

*Frankincense* represented God; the fragrant aroma of Life itself, The Prince of Peace came willingly to give His life. It also was representative of His priesthood.

*Myrrh* represented the death that was to come of our Lord and Savior.

The WISE MEN knew of the impending sacrificial life of the Lord Jesus Christ. They foresaw that the Lord Jesus Christ would suffer and die.

Wisdom is a high degree of knowledge by learned men. The wise use good practical judgment. The wise can make true and right decisions.

In the "*Fraction of St. Epiphanius*" we are told:



Wisdom is brighter than the sun and  
all the stars.

Wisdom is the light of the Father,  
existing with Him from Eternity.

Wisdom has existed from Eternity; she renews  
everyone.

She enters the souls of the righteous through  
all ages.

Wisdom is more precious than pearls, and unequal  
to all honors.

Wisdom has counsel, might, and knowledge.

By wisdom kings reign, great men are honored,  
and the princes of the earth govern!

Wisdom loves those who love her and protects  
those who keep her.

Those who seek wisdom find grace!

Wisdom walks in the way of justice, and moves

in the path of truth.

Wisdom grants richness to those  
who acknowledge her, and fills their  
treasures with joy.



We can tell why the WISE MEN were considered truly “WISE MEN” by contemplating on the lessons their examples teach us. They followed the star sensing that God’s leading them. Isaiah 2: 3 plainly states, *“He will teach us of His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.”*

With the Glorious Feast of the Nativity renew your commitment to allow God to direct your life.

The wise men responded in faith. The faith of the WISE MEN was an active one. They responded to the will of God. One can only imagine what hardships and uncertainties they faced traveling to pay homage to the newborn Lord Jesus Christ. One thing is certain though; God was not secondary in their life. The Magi is symbolic of the Church whose membership is determined by faith, not ethnic ancestry. An active faith, such as that of the WISE MEN, will always place God and the Church first

and foremost in your life.

The WISE MEN never lost sight of what they were seeking. They were informed that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. They trusted and obeyed the Divine Inspiration they had received. We also must obey the Word of God found in the Bible. We, as the WISE MEN, through obedience will find the true “Bright and Morning Star”.

The wisdom of the WISE MEN sent them searching for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Gifts prophetic of a life to come were given to our Lord and Savior. Gifts befitting more than an ordinary king were presented. Do we offer the Lord Jesus Christ our best gifts as the Magi did?

In contemplation of the approaching Glorious Feast of the Nativity let each of us follow in the example of the WISE MEN and allow the Lord Jesus Christ to direct our way. Ask for faith that you might see the path of God. Follow where the Lord leads you. Trust and obey His Instructions. Humbly pray that as you travel life’s journey, you will worship as the WISE MEN. Kneel before

the infant Child. Experience true joy in “*The Wisdom of God*” (1 Corinthians 1: 24).

Ask for insight and wisdom as each day unfolds. His is the greatest and most challenging Mystery from first to last. Perhaps this is why “WISE” MEN still seek Him.

May the blessings of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!







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## CHAPTER SIX

# FEAST OF THE HOLY NATIVITY

**A**s we recall His amazing humility and endless love for mankind; remembering St. Paul's instructions to us to embrace at all times, God's mind at His incarnation. *"For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"* (Colossians 2: 5-9).

Becoming nothing is extremely apparent in the Son's act of bending His will to the will of the Father. The Son came to the world as High Priest, and had to have a sacrifice to offer. *"For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer"* (Hebrews 8: 3). But what is He to offer when the Father is not pleased *"In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin"* (Hebrews 10: 6)? Since the Father did not want the Son, on His coming to the world, to offer Him an animal sacrifice or an offering; He prepared for Him a body to present it as an offering

*"Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me'"* (Hebrews 10: 5).

So, what was the Son's reaction? The Son submitted all of His will to that of the Father when he said, *"Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God"* (Hebrews 10: 9).

The Son, in total submission and obedience to the Father's will, complied praying in Gethsemane three times, shortly before His death on the cross, saying, *"Not as I will, but as You will"* and *"Your will be done"* (Matthew 26: 39, 42). Thus, the Son became the High

Priest and the sacrifice at the same time and submitted until death on the cross.

How magnificent! He, whom heaven and earth obey, submitted in amazing humility to His good Father. St. Paul tells us that the son continues to submit to the Father until His second coming, *“Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all”* (1 Corinthians 15: 28).

It was only through the Son’s bending of His will and total submission to the Father, that the Father’s will and pleasure in saving and sanctifying the world was made possible. So the Father was glorified in the Son (John 17: 4). That is why when the angels witnessed the incarnation, they shouted joyfully, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”* (Luke 2: 14). They knew that in this nativity was the glorification of the Father and fulfillment of His will.

This mind, that of becoming nothing shakes the faithful at every Divine Liturgy. When we stand before the Son’s sacrifice of full submission and total obedience; we cannot help but fully submit all our freedoms to God, the Pantocrator. The father priest leads us in this offering when he says, *“I offer to you, O my master the*

*symbols of my freedom. I write my deeds according to your words”* (The Gregorian Liturgy).

Our fathers, the saints, offered their lives in full submission to God; St. Paul manifested his readiness in his words: *“Lord, what do You want me to do?”* (Acts 9: 6) and his advice to us: *“Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?”* (Hebrews 12: 9) shows full submission to God as the only way to live life in its fullness. On the other hand, rebelling against God and rejecting His will leads to death and eternal damnation as befell the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who rejected the will of God for themselves (Luke 7: 30).

As for us, despite our daily prayers in which we proclaim “Your will be done”; we reject this will and rebel against it all the time rather proclaiming: “let our will be done.” Instead of offering a prayer of submission and obedience to God’s will, we turn our prayers into a long list of demands and wants according to our will presenting them to God to fulfill for us “according to our will” without the decency of consulting Him first nor getting His consent about them.

Submitting to God is a sign of faith in Him; because the myrrh that He chooses for us is far sweeter than

whatever good we choose for ourselves. God chose that St. Paul's thorn in the flesh remain with him despite his pleadings; and St. Paul accepted gladly and thankfully (2 Corinthians 12: 7-10) trusting, *"That all things work together for good to those who love God"* (Romans 8: 28).

Submitting to God is a sign of our true self discovery. We possess neither wisdom nor knowledge; for God has *"made foolish the wisdom of this world"* (1 Corinthians 1: 20). Therefore, we should reject our own self counseling, not out of humility; but because the wisdom of the wise will be destroyed and the understanding of the prudent will be brought to nothing (1 Corinthians 1: 19). The more we acquire self-knowledge, the more we will realize the need to submit to God. St. Peter experienced this confessing: *"Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net"* (Luke 5: 5).

Hence the question that poses itself today is whether the society that fights prayers in school, defends sin and legalizes it; and denies God's commandments is a society that submits to God's will. Absolutely not! A society that is saturated with crime, injustice, sin, divorce, theft, adultery, pornography, etc...evidences a rebellious, God-void society. Those who defend these practices under the

pretext of love and tolerance are duped as much as our mother Eve was duped by the serpent, *“Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord; let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven”*

(Lamentations 3: 40 - 41).

Beloved brethren, let us trust in Him Who, born in a manger; came specifically to deliver us, console the small-spirited, make peace on earth and reconcile us to the Father. He came for us to have a life and a better one.

I pray that God blesses your lives, grants peace to His church and the whole world, and keeps the life of our honored father Pope Shenouda, the third. A very happy new year and blessed Nativity Feast to you all.



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