

Nativity of Christ, 2005

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

To the Venerable Pastors, God-loving Monastics and Devout Children of our Diocesan Family:

I greet you warmly with the joy of this festal season in which the light of Christ is revealed to the world.

This divine light comes to us especially through the feasts of the Nativity and the Theophany of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which are celebrated during this time of the year when the days are short and the earth is at its darkest. This physical darkness is a reminder to us of the spiritual darkness of sin, corruption and death that reigned at the time of the Incarnation. *The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up* (Matthew 4:16). This light was the birth and manifestation of the Lord incarnate, a light that pierced through the darkness and revealed to all the depths of God's love for mankind.

Although the world around us may still lie in darkness, the gift of God's love shines upon us as well, for in the Incarnation we are offered, not just the birth of a human child, but the perfect union of divinity and humanity: "Heaven and earth are united today, for Christ is born. Today has God come upon earth, and man gone up to heaven." (Litya for the Feast of the Nativity). In becoming man, Christ offers to all of us the possibility of becoming, by grace, what He is by Nature, of overcoming our human passions and of ascending from earth to Heaven.

Let us offer our fervent prayer that Christ will enlighten the darkness in the world and within our own hearts with the light of His Incarnation. Let us find comfort and joy knowing that by His Nativity in the flesh, Christ "has shone upon the world with the light of understanding" and by His Baptism in the Jordan, He has "appeared and enlightened the world" and made manifest the worship of the Trinity.

May the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*, be with you and your loved ones now and always.

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With love in Christ,

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Bishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania