

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2020

(By Metropolitan Sotirios of Pisidia)

"Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will to men"

The message of the Angels from heaven to humanity is of particular importance today concerning all the peoples on earth, who are suffering from confusion, anxiety, insecurity, deadly conflicts, exploitation and the sad consequences of the epidemic. And the question is: where do we end up with this situation? Along with all the other everyday problems in human societies, there are psychological ones that have been added, such as depression, despair, the tendency to commit suicide.

The prophetic word always warns: ***"those who are far from You shall perish"*** (Psalm 72 [73], 27), either as individuals or as nations. These divinely inspired words have been verified countless times in the history of humankind. Therefore, only by returning to God can the world be saved. In particular, we Orthodox are called upon to bear good witness of our faith, so that others may find their way to the Savior Jesus.

When Christ was born, humble people rushed to worship Him; not only the simple shepherds but also the wise Magi from the East, who did not hesitate to bend their knees and pay their respects before the holy Infant. The religious leaders of the Jews knew from the books of the Prophets that the Messiah would come in Bethlehem of Judea, as it is evidenced by the information they gave to Herod. Yet, they did not rush to visit Jesus, even though Bethlehem is only eight kilometers [8 km] from Jerusalem. And when the rulers of Jerusalem later dealt with Jesus, their sole purpose was to exterminate Him.

The Lord said, ***"Learn by my example, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and your hearts will find rest"*** (Matt. 11:29). We all know how simple and humble the Lord was, from His birth to His sacrifice on the Cross. Therefore, only humble and simple souls can approach, get to know and become united with the humble Jesus and find rest, peace and true joy close to Him. Through our own example and our prayer, my brethren, let us help others to approach the Savior Christ, so that their souls may become enlightened and receive Him, so that they may enjoy the true joy and peace that He offers.

At the same time, my brothers and sisters, especially during these holy days, let us take care of our brothers who are sick, suffering from various causes. Let us do our best for them, motivating other well-meaning fellow human beings to support them to the best of their ability.

In addition, let us also pray for the whole world, which is tormented by the incurable pandemic of COVID-19. Let us ask our Redeemer for all the peoples of the earth, for the sick, the bedridden, the homeless, the captives, the prisoners, the hungry, for those in war zones, the refugees. And let us also pray for all those who live in the darkness of ignorance of the true God and they are in despair. My dear brothers and sisters, just as we sing in the hymns of the this great feast, the Nativity of the Savior is a historical event, yet we experience it as present, as if it is happening now. That is why the word "today" is often repeated. During the liturgical time, when the holy sacraments of the Church are performed, all the events of the divine Economy, the redemptive presence of the Son of God on earth, are repeated here and now mystically, so that we the faithful may become participants of the salvation they offer to us. That is why in the Christmas Divine Liturgy we can sing today along with the Angels the hymn ***"glory to God in the highest"***. We can see, together with the shepherds, the divine ***"Infant lying in the manger"***. And along with the Magi of the East we can worship the King of our souls, by offering to Him our own gifts: instead of gold, our warm and loving hearts like mangers, so that He may come and dwell in us; instead of myrrh, our sincere repentance for our sins, and instead of incense, to offer our wholehearted worship and gratitude for His Incarnation and the salvation He offers to us from decay and death.

My dear Brothers and Sisters,

I wish to all of you this year to experience Christmas in good health, and with deep faith and gratitude to our Lord, Who took our human form, in order to offer us life and Resurrection. May you all celebrate happily and peacefully with your loved ones this great feast.

Have a Blessed Christmas!

+ Metropolitan Sotirios of Pisidia