



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem © ✱ Knights of Malta ✱

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Chancellor's Update

The Incarnation and Nativity of Christ – Cause of Our Joy

Our former Armenian theological scholar, Joseph Topalian, OSJ (deceased), had written the following article in 2006.

Every Christmas, countless Nativity scenes appear in homes and churches throughout the world. With all the tumult and commercialism of today's Christmas Season drowning out its real meaning, these crèches help our distracted minds and weak imaginations to recall what we all know by **studying the Nativity scene, pondering some questions about this new-born Babe lying in the manger:** The answers can fill volumes, but here is a humble attempt to provide a few on a single sheet of paper.

WHEN AND WHERE? The Christmas Story is not a myth. As related in the pages of the New Testament, it tells of a unique historical Birth that took place over 2000 years ago in an animal-shelter cave in the town of Bethlehem of Judah. Many details of this event were miraculously foretold hundreds of years earlier in the prophecies of the Old Testament. For example, Mary and Joseph were from Galilee. How could anyone have foretold centuries earlier that the time for Mary to give birth to Jesus would coincide with the timing of a decree by the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus requiring them to go far south to register in Bethlehem, unless it were God Himself inspiring the prophecies? As we study this scene, we remind ourselves that everything about this Birth has consequences that transcend time and space, and impacts each of us to the core of our being.

WHAT? *Nature* answers this question "What?" There in the manger is a human nature just like ours, a body of flesh and blood and a human soul (with intellect and will). Like us, conceived in time in a mother's womb (although uniquely by the power of the Holy Spirit), born of this mother Mary, subject to laws of human growth and development, etc.

WHO? *Person* answers this question "Who?" This Babe, Jesus, is none other than Son of God Himself, the Eternal Word, the Logos, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, a Divine Person, eternally existing, now entered into our world of time and matter, and taken on a human nature. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." One Divine Person, operating through His unseen infinitely powerful and loving Divine Nature as God, and through His visible human nature taken from Mary as the God-Man Jesus Christ.

WHO AND WHAT? In His whole life, we see the interplay of these two natures in one Person. For example, with His human voice, Jesus Christ says "Be still!" or "Be healed!" but it is through His Unseen Divine Nature that He calms the waves and restores health. He performs miracles for the benefit of others but not for Himself because He also wishes to be our Model subjecting Himself to the limits of human nature as in His helplessness at His Birth and Infancy, and in His Passion and Death.

WHY? He came to save us from sin. Therefore, the story in Genesis about the fall of man and nature is not a myth. God respects the free will in man whom He created in His image, and so allowed our first parents to lose all. But, in time, the free will "Let it be" of Mary enabled God the Son to take on our human flesh and blood and to buy back (redeem) what was lost.

As a consequence of the Fall, mankind was suffering under Satan's dominion, imprisoned in a cruel world of sin with no hope of release, shut out from any prospect of fulfilling that end to which it had been destined and for which it was crying out (the direct vision of God). Realizing this, our reaction can only be to shout with joy at the sight of this Virgin Mother and Divine Babe come to ransom us. Can anyone doubt his own dignity or worth in God's eyes when he reflects on the high price this Babe in the manger came lovingly and eagerly to pay on the Cross for our redemption? Is it possible not to prostrate oneself in gratitude before this loving Mother and Child?

HOW? (CHRIST'S PLAN, NOT MAN'S) Through His Redemption, Christ opened the gates of Heaven for us all. But for our entrance there (Salvation), He did not roll us in on a red carpet. In keeping with our dignity as images of God, He requires us to cooperate freely with the means He provides through the Church he established on the Apostles. Here on earth we must still bear the brunt of the Fall, and work out our salvation in fear and trembling, but this Church Militant provides us with the weapons to wage spiritual battle against our enemies (our fallen nature and evil spirits).

Since Christ (in His Divine Love for us) desires all men to be saved, we might ask why He would seemingly leave us and depend on a Church composed of weak human beings and risk the loss of our salvation. God's ways are mysterious. Though He ascended into Heaven, we know He remains in intimate union with this Church, forming of its members a Mystical Body of which He is its Invisible Head.

Looking more closely, we see how Christ's plan is uniquely adapted to and respects the dual substances of our human nature, body and soul. He establishes an incarnational Church, a visible society (kingdom), which He endows with powers to teach, sanctify, and govern. Through it He reveals to us a body of guiding truths called the Deposit of Faith. He sanctifies us through a Sacramental system, lifting to divine heights simple earthly goods like water and oil, bread and wine, the absolving voice of a priest, the mutual promises of spouses, etc. Through Baptism, for example, humble water wipes away the stain of Original Sin, marks our souls for Heaven, raises us to a supernatural share in the Divine Life (incorporating us in Christ's Mystical Body, the Church), and enables us to merit by our free actions graces for ourselves and others. At death, if we have persevered in the original state of grace that Baptism confers (or restored it through the Sacrament of Penance when we lose it), then we will have saved our souls. Otherwise all is lost!

In a word, Christ's plan for us is to incorporate ourselves in His Church through which we will be born again into a new life, which transcends nature (as required for Heaven) and enabled to use the gifts of truth (doctrine) and sanctification (Sacraments) to achieve our salvation.

WHAT NOW? The Church which Christ established is necessarily One, Holy, Universal (Catholic), and by His design, Apostolic (built on His Apostles, headed by Peter and His Successors). If not a member, should we not seek out this unique Church knowing what is at risk? With our free wills we can avail ourselves of the ocean of Graces this Babe Christ and His Blessed Mother have won for us, thereby bringing to fruition all the gifts promised even here amidst the sorrows, trials and disappointments of life. If we strive to avoid sin and practice virtue, we can enjoy inner peace and joy, and live in the Blessed Hope for the ultimate end of our creation, the supreme gift of enjoying happiness with God in the Beatific Vision.

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ONE AND ALL!

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