

Papal Message for the Nativity 2009

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His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

Pope of Alexandria & Patriarch of the See of St. Mark

The 2009 Papal Christmas Message.

My brethren and children in the lands of immigration, clergy and laity.

Peace to you from the Lord and grace, with my greetings to you during the Glorious Feast of Nativity. Wishing you in these occasions a new holy life that is better than what it was in the previous year.

I wish to say to you that the birth of Christ was an annunciation of salvation, as the angel said to the shepherds "I bring you good tidings of great joy ... for there is born to you this day ... a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11) Therefore, in His birth, His name was called Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

This salvation was promised by the Lord since the beginning of creation, when God promised our mother Eve that her offspring will crush the head of the serpent (that is, Satan). This matter was to be fulfilled through the Redemption. People needed to be prepared to accept the thought of redemption. This needed time and passed through stages:

The first matter was that sin revealed to man his nakedness. For God to cover this nakedness, He saw that the fig leaves were insufficient, so He made for them tunics of skin and clothed them with these. Of course, these tunics of skin were a result of a sacrifice. Thus man knew that sin causes nakedness, and that sacrifice results in covering.

After this, people learnt about the offering of sacrifices, and the first sacrifice was the one offered by Abel from the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. Sacrifices and offerings continued to be presented and they were for God alone, consumed by fire as a sign of pleasing God's heart.

They learned to offer the 'Passover,' and by the sprinkling of its blood on their doors, they were saved from death according to the saying of the Lord "...and when I see the blood, I will pass over you..." (Exodus 12:13) The Passover was a symbol of the transfer from death to life, as it also symbolizes the Lord Christ according to the writings of Paul the Apostle (I Corinthians 5:7). Through the Passover, they knew the meaning of redemption, that is, "the innocent dies for the guilty." Then the offerings were explained to them in the Book of Leviticus; so they used to place their hands upon the sacrifice to indicate that this sacrifice is on their behalf, and confess their sins over its head to indicate that the sacrifice carries these sins for them. The summarized concept of the offering was that an innocent being without sin, carries the sin of the guilty one and dies instead of them. And this is Redemption. Many generations passed, and this concept was fixed in their minds, that the Redeemer would die for them carrying their sins. They understood that He must be a Man, for the judgment of death that we inherited was issued against man.

What was left was the preparation of the pure Virgin from whom the Redeemer was to be born according to the prophecy of Isaiah (7:14). It was necessary that she is a humble person, able to bear this glory that God is born from her without her heart being elevated. It was also to prepare that righteous elderly man who would protect and look after the Virgin Mary, and to live with her as a Virgin whose pregnancy was from the Holy Spirit.

Then it was a must to prepare 'the angel' who will prepare the way before the Redeemer by returning people to repentance and preparing them by baptism. Then to prepare the apostles who will spread the faith in the Redeemer.

Then it was necessary to set up the time that all these preparations would be fulfilled together. This is what the Apostle called "the fullness of time." (Galatians 4:4) Then it was necessary that a universal language be widespread by which evangelism can be fulfilled in all parts of the lands. This was the Greek language, to which the Old Testament was translated in the Septuagint.

Thus, the fullness of time came in which the Lord Christ was Incarnate from the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit; and He was crucified for us carrying our sins, died for us and resurrected.

May the Feast of Nativity be joyous, a blessing and a renewal of life to all. Be well in the Lord, absolved from His Holy Spirit.

(Signed)

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

January 2009