



COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

Metropolitan Youssef



Believe Nativity Feast 2023 Message

My Beloved,

I wish you a joyous Nativity Feast and blessed New Year. On this holy night, the entire world is called to believe. The incarnation of the Word of God fulfilled promises and prophecies. The beginning of healing and dissolving the estranged relationship between heaven and earth began with the nativity of the Lord Jesus. The true worship of God begins with the birth of Christ the King and Savior of the world. “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘God with us,’” (Matthew 1:23). Believing is the first step but not the only one. Believing must last a lifetime. Believing does not equate to a life without challenges, but an assurance that God is with us and ever present in our lives. Thus, all challenges can be managed: “For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37). Believing in God is not based on words but a joyful and growing relationship with Him.

St. Joseph, the righteous man, had legitimate concerns regarding St. Mary, but was assured in a dream and believed: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20–21). St. Elizabeth acknowledged St. Mary’s faith in God’s word and proclaimed: “Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luke 1:45). Because she believed, the Virgin Mother of God is the strongest woman mentioned in the Holy Scripture and throughout history. She is pictured as the meek and soft-spoken gentle dove, but she is also strong, bold, and courageous. She believed and was unafraid of gossip, criticism, and even death should her society condemn her as an unwed mother at that time. She did not hide in shame but immediately left to serve her elderly cousin during both of their pregnancies and expected nothing in return. At the wedding in Cana of Galilee (cf. John 2:1–12), when the couple was distressed because of what they lacked, she went directly to her Son and stated their need without asking for a miracle or favor. She believed that He would solve their problem and He did. How many marriages today fall apart because they stopped believing that God could solve their problems?

St. Mary’s silent reverence spoke volumes. Hunted by Herod, she sheltered the Infant Christ from Bethlehem to Egypt, the land of her ancestors’ exodus, and accepted homelessness as a refugee and a stranger because she believed. Having heard the great news from the angels, the shepherds believed and hurried to behold the nativity of the Lord: “And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger” (Luke 2:16). The Magi proved to be wise for they did not ignore the profound image in the sky, which they perceived as a divine message, but yearned to see the Infant King to worship Him: “Where is He who has been born



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King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Matthew 2:2).

It is sad to hear that some people go to church reluctantly or out of guilt. Rather, learn from the simple and the wise who believed and welcomed Him. With joy and devotion, the simple hastened to greet Him and the wise unwearingly reached Him. Let us enter His Church as the Magi entered His home: “And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11). What treasure can each of us present to Him? Tithing is merely ten percent, yet some people do not even want to do that. Others search for unneeded or worn-out items to donate to the church, but these wise men opened their treasures and presented Him with significant gifts.

Therefore, my beloved, believe and hasten to worship Him. How disappointing and strange it is to hear pure ignorance and empty words of those who ridicule the faithful. Yet, they call themselves Christian, though Christ is not a priority in their lives. They have adopted a convoluted identity and model it to their children, causing them more confusion and detachment from the Church. Examine the reward of those who believed. Let us believe wholeheartedly and welcome Him daily with thankfulness for all His goodness. God’s peace resonates in the lives of believers in every condition and in whatever condition. For skeptics, happiness is always provisional and dependent upon something material, whether it is finances, advances, romances, or mere chances, but they are never completely internally secure. For them, happiness is always contingent and the void in their souls remains because they cannot achieve inner peace without Him. True peace can only come through Jesus Christ, our good Savior. This is the holy night when peace entered into the world. Believe and the fruit of your faith will shine forth and lead others to Christ the King just as angels proclaimed to the shepherds and the star led the wise men to Him.

Through the intercession of the Mother of God, may the Lord keep the life of our honored father, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope and Patriarch of the Church of Alexandria and the See of St. Mark, for many years and peaceful times.

Come, believe, worship, and glorify the Lord, King, and Savior, Jesus Christ!

God bless you.

Metropolitan Youssef
Bishop Basil
Bishop Gregory
Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States