

Tis The Season To Rejoice

In the fullness of time God sent His only begotten Son to dwell among us.

Imagine the depths of His love for us to send an immortal being to take on mortal flesh and become one with us.

For this we rejoice, we stand in awe, we thank Him, we glorify Him, we praise Him, and we can do nothing else but worship Him. But, above all we rejoice. How else can we react? For us who sat in darkness and despair now see a great light – a light that was there before God created the sun and stars [Genesee 1:3, 14-16], and the light that we will see in the Kingdom when the sun ceases to shine in the new heaven and the new earth [Revelations 22:5].

Joy has come into the world, a joy that is captured in the famous Christmas Carol, “Joy to the World:”

Joy to the world, the Lord has come.
Let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare Him room, and
Heaven and Nature sing (3x)

When Jesus was born of Mary the heavenly host sang, the angels appeared to humble shepherds to announce the Good Tidings of great joy, and the Magi began their two year journey to bring Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and to worship Him.

With His coming into the world he transformed all creation by inaugurating a new covenant between God and Man – a covenant that re-opened the doors of Paradise to us mortals. For this alone we stand in awe to thank Him for His mercy, His compassion, and His love for us.

Rejoice! And, as St Paul says “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice!” [Phil 4:4]

As we prepare ourselves with fasting to celebrate this joyous moment in time, let us contemplate the cosmic nature of this beloved gift of the Christ Child. What does it mean for us? How does it, or should it, impact our thinking, our beliefs, and our actions?

Just think of it, God – the immortal one – the Creator of the universe and us, became incarnate of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. He lowered Himself to become Man to speak to us directly rather through the prophets He had earlier sent, to teach us how to live abundantly in this world and prepare for the next one, and to understand first-hand the vicissitudes and dynamics of earthly life including the machinations of the Evil One.

So, to rescue us from our plight He went to the Cross to enter Hades to defeat the Devil in his stronghold and break the bonds and shackles imprisoning us.

As we contemplate the cosmic significance of His birth to the Virgin, let us rejoice, let our hearts be filled to overflowing with gratitude and thanks, let us humble ourselves before this almighty One as the Magi did, and to live our lives to reach the goal He has for us to become one with Him. How awesome is that?

We will be tested, no doubt about that just as Job was tested, as the Apostles were, and as Christ Himself was tested. Testing is part of life. You do not earn in this life a diploma or degree without a series of tests, do you? Of course, not!

So, how would you expect to gain entrance into everlasting life without pain and struggles? Think of misfortunes as tests. As Paul tells us “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” [Phil 2:12] The good news about pain and suffering, however, is that God is always there to help, to give us patience and strength to endure just as He gave it to Paul and the Apostles, and to the saints and martyrs throughout the years. Let us not forget that His own Mother suffered as she endured Joseph’s doubt, as she had to escape to Egypt after He was born, and then as she had to suffer the indignities of His trumped up trial and crucifixion. She, the Theotokos, was not spared from life’s troubles and tests.

Moreover, we need to remember that we will not be tested beyond our ability to endure through it as St Paul reminds us:

No temptation has overcome you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. [I Cor 10:13]

Those of us who get seduced by the worldly culture that preaches a life of ease as long as we buy the latest merchandise or travel to an exotic resort forget Christ’s message to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him [Matt 16:24]. The cross we carry are the misfortunes we experience as we live our lives: hardships, disappointments, betrayals, health issues, financial set-backs, and marital troubles. As we follow Him He is our guide and shepherd right there with us to show us the Way and to protect us as a shepherd protects his sheep. As He said: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for His sheep.” [John 10:11] David captured this aspect of Him when he wrote Psalm 23.

The Lord is my shepherd
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;

He leads me in the path of righteousness
For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley
of the shadow to death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy
shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

The reality of life is that we will be tested and we will die just as He did. The Good News is that if we believe in Him who came as a babe for our salvation from death, we will be with Him when we pass into eternal life. We are reminded of His death in the icon of the Nativity as He is shown "swaddled" as one is swaddled for burial.

Yes, the joy of the season is tempered by remembrance of death in this life, but we are comforted with the promise of the joy of eternal life in His Resurrection. So, let us celebrate His birth and this cosmic event with song, with good food and drink, and with worship. Let us rejoice!

Christ is Born!

Glorify Him!