



2023 Christmas Message of His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas

Beloved in Christ,

As we approach the Great Feast of the Nativity, I would like to call to mind a beautiful, almost haunting, Christmas carol, which has its origins as a Latin hymn. “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” is a beloved and well-known carol that speaks to the hearts of Christians around the world. The stirring minor melody conveys a deep sense of longing and anticipation — longing for the presence of our Saviour and anticipation for the fulfilment of all God’s promises to humanity.

The carol repeatedly calls on Christ Emmanuel, which means ‘God with us’ in Hebrew, and echoes the cries of a despondent humanity that is sinking into darkness and suffering, yet reaching out for deliverance. The exultant refrain “Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel” rings out with confidence and joy — that which was awaited will soon come to pass, the prophecies are fulfilled and the Sun of Righteousness will appear as promised, dispelling the darkness, bringing life, hope, and salvation to the world. Our Saviour will walk amongst us; He will heal all our infirmities and deliver us from every sorrow, evil, and distress.

Let us take care this time of year, dear sisters and brothers, to remember that, while holiday decorations and seasonal traditions are indeed wonderful, nothing should ever threaten to overshadow the profound cosmic and personal significance of Christ’s birth. Christmas is an affirmation that God hears our supplications. His mercy is so great that He sent His Only Begotten Son to save the world and bring us back into the bosom of His love.

This spirit of reconciliation and redemption is beautifully illustrated in Christ’s parable of the prodigal son. A rash and impulsive son ends up captive to his own foolishness, trapped in miserable circumstances, downtrodden and alone. When he remembers his father’s house, he longs for the goodness, safety, comfort, and beauty that he once knew. The father, seeing his lost son humbly approaching from afar, runs out to embrace him on the road. The father not only restores his son’s dignity, but lifts him up, showering him with honour and glory as if celebrating the birth of a new child. We can see here the essence of Christmas: God not only restores and welcomes us back to Himself but, in His infinite love and mercy, richly blesses and elevates the entire cosmos to a new reality by sending us His Son, incarnate in our own human nature.

Does our world today not often resemble the prodigal son at his lowest point, lost, confused and directionless? Do we not daily see the sad consequences of our errors and hard-heartedness? Christmas is a time to remember that we need only turn our faces back toward our Father and His house, to stretch out our arms and cry out, “O come, O Come, Emmanuel”, and, behold! Immediately, our Father sends us His Son to be born in our very hearts, to transfigure our pain and sorrow into true and abundant life.

This year, amidst the obligations and tasks that we will certainly attend to, let us also embrace a spirit of faith and confidence in God's answers to our supplications. Let us give thanksgiving this Christmas for the hope, forgiveness, and salvation that God freely offers us. Let us in turn extend the same charity and mercy that we enjoy from Our Father, to our neighbours, especially to those less materially fortunate, recognizing the icon of Christ in each person that we encounter and extending a helping hand. And do not be afraid to wish people a warm and sincere "Merry Christmas". Smile, laugh, and celebrate for all to see the blessings of God, for Christ is born and we glorify Him.

And as the year 2023 comes to a close, let us look to the New Year 2024 with a renewed perspective. May the coming year be filled with all the grace, love and hope that Christ brings the world, and may we carry in our hearts all through the new year the words of the carol, calling them to mind as a prayer whenever the struggles and burdens of life come to weigh on us, "O Come, Thou Dayspring, from on high, and cheer us by drawing nigh; Disperse the gloomy clouds of night".

Merry Christmas and a most blessed and Happy New Year 2024

With paternal love and blessings,

✠ Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain