



COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH
Diocese of Melbourne & Affiliated Regions

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Feast of Nativity

7 January 2010

His Grace Bishop Suriel

Bishop of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16)

Dear beloved clergy and laity of the Christ loving Diocese of Melbourne and its affiliated regions. Wishing you all a fruitful New Year that I pray will bring you all many blessings and joy. I thank the Lord Christ for bringing us to this joyous day and to celebrate once again His incarnation, of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Saint Mary.

Saint Paul, the greatest Christian missionary speaks of the truth of the incarnation without any doubt whatsoever when he says to his disciple Saint Timothy, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifested in the flesh...” (1 Timothy 3:16) This truth is indisputable, undeniable and beyond any question. It is the truth that all genuine believers confess. And what is being confessed really happened.

Indeed it seems incomprehensible to our limited minds that God can become man and can be born of a Virgin. Yet this is truly the mystery of godliness, He is above nature and controls it as he desires and can do all things. “For with God nothing will be impossible.” (Luke 1:37) Can God become Man



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whilst still being fully divine? Can He be born of a Virgin without the seed of a man? Most definitely, and without a shadow of a doubt, for He is the Omnipotent One.

But why did God have to become Man? Why could He not have saved us by just appearing in the Flesh? He most certainly has the power and authority to do so! We must realize that the sin of mankind was against God Himself who is sinless and without limit, the Omnipresent One. Hence, the sin that was committed could only be forgiven by someone who is sinless, without limit and had the ability to save. Not only this, but God's justice had to be fulfilled and someone had to die, and die on behalf of our human nature and have the ability to take on the sin of the whole world. The only Person that fits that description is the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, it was inevitable for salvation to be fulfilled that He had to be one of us, fully human, yet without sin and at the same time fully divine in order to save us. Saint Paul says, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

Saint John witnesses to this truth of the incarnate Logos by saying, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us." (1 John 1:1-2)



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The Lord Jesus Christ was preached to the Gentiles, to all the nations of the world. This is a glorious part of the “mystery of godliness”: that Christ came to save all people, even the heathen – those who knew absolutely nothing about God and are so immoral, depraved, and corrupted, and so hopeless and helpless in life. Christ is not the exclusive Saviour of a particular race or people. He is the Saviour of all people and all nations, both Jew and Gentile alike. All that believe on His Holy Name, repent from their sins, are baptized and live according to the truth of Christ will be saved. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16) The Lord says, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14) The Lord also said to the two disciples along the road to Emmaus, “and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:47)

Christ was believed on in the world. This was the very purpose for the Incarnation, the very reason why the Lord Jesus Christ had come to earth: that humans might believe on Him and be saved to live with God eternally. When Christ left earth and ascended into heaven, there were only one hundred and twenty who were following Him and who began to share the gospel. But within fifty years every nation of the world had begun to know Christ. Thousands upon thousands had accepted Christ – so many in fact that Saint Paul declared that the gospel had been carried to the ends of the world. Saint Paul says to the Colossians, “if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.” (Colossians 1:23)



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The point is this: What is the difference between the witness of the Church in the first centuries of Christianity and our witness today? Do we have the same strong belief? Are we willing to sacrifice all for the sake of Christ and witnessing to His incarnation and His message of salvation and love to all creatures? We are blessed to be part of an apostolic Church, an authentic Church that has followed the teachings of Christ for 2000 years without deviation. The Church of the martyrs, the Church of asceticism, the Church of the great heroes of faith, and truly a holy and glorious Church of praise.

Hence, I would like to declare the Year 2010 as the year of mission and evangelism in the Diocese of Melbourne and its affiliated regions. It is a year to declare and share to all around us the salvation and joy that the Incarnation of Christ the Logos brings to humanity. This year we hope to launch many events around the theme of mission and evangelism and to fulfill the divine command of the Lord to His disciples when He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) There is no choice here whether we choose to do the work of mission and evangelism, it is compulsory and it is the Lord's command to us.

The work of mission and evangelism is not only the responsibility of the bishop or a particular priest or church, it is a work that every Christian should be involved in. It is not only a work to be done in Fiji, the South Pacific and Pakistan, but in every parish and every city within our vast diocese. Not only in the cities where Copts live but in fact in every town and suburb within every city. When a bishop is ordained for a diocese he is not only ordained for the Copts but over a geographical region and responsible for preaching the gospel to every creature within that geographical region! Hence, we must all work together and



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be active to do the work of the Lord with all zeal and diligence. We need to open our hearts and minds and seek many who are hungry and thirsty for the message that the incarnate Word of God brings to us this day.

We ask the incarnate Lord to keep for us the life of our holy father His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark. His Holiness as the successor of Saint Mark the apostle has taught us much about mission and been an inspiration to us all, may God keep him for us. We pray for our motherland Egypt and we thank the Child of the Manger for bringing joy to all Copts in Egypt and abroad by sending His Holy Mother the Virgin Saint Mary, the Theotokos, to visit Egypt once more during the holy month of Kiahk, December, 2009.

This amazing apparition of Saint Mary on top of the Church of the Virgin Mary and Archangel Michael in Warraq, Giza was witnessed by tens of thousands of Christians and Muslims. Some may try to denounce this apparition for various reasons, but the tens of thousands that saw her witnessed to her true apparition, and the videos and images are clear beyond a shadow of a doubt. As well as the healing miracles that took place. Regardless of what others say, we know her, we know our Holy Mother and what she looks like and we know that her apparition is true and we ask her to intercede on our behalf in front of the throne of her beloved Son. It is indeed a comforting sign from heaven to strengthen the faith of the believers and bring joy that Immanuel – God is with us!

We also pray for Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Pakistan and for all our communities here and there.



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With every spiritual joy I wish you all a spiritual celebration of the 2010
Feast of the Nativity and that it may fill your lives with heavenly blessings.

Be absolved through the Holy Spirit.

Suriel

Servant of the Christ-loving Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions