



The Importance of the Christmas Message

by the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

This message is a compilation of sermons which the late Rev. Eusebius Stephanou had written in the past, I know it will be a tremendous blessing for you, Joseph Abbate / President.
From year to year Christmas is becoming de-Christianized to the point where

the very word “Christmas” is avoided. Now it has become fashionable, especially on the public media, to use the greeting “Happy Holidays”, rather than “Merry Christmas”. We have not only taken Christ out of Christmas, but we have dropped the very mention of Christmas! We cannot escape from giving an account to God. God has put man on earth for a purpose. Christmas comes every year to remind us that man is not on earth by accident. Neither is he the end result of blind forces in nature. Man is the object of a loving God Who provides for the fulfillment of his destiny and governs the whole of history.

For the sake of man the Creator assumed human form to become one of us that He might take us up to share in His divine life. Interplanetary exploration of recent times has made it increasingly clear to us that earth is really a microscopic planet in an infinite space; that man is still more infinitesimal speck of dust in the vastness of the universe. It has become ever more obvious that earth is surely no unique center around which the universe revolves.

Man's worth cannot be determined in terms of weight and the size of his physical mass. Physically and chemically he is virtually

worthless, being 80 percent water and as costly as 80 cents. If man has any importance at all, it is to be seen in terms of the spiritual dimension of his existence. His soul is worth more than the total universe. Our Lord assured us of this truth: *“What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

In terms of his eternal end man



surpasses in value all the planets, solar systems and galaxies put together. Christmas teaches us that for the sake of the eternal welfare of man's soul the Son and the Logos of God walked upon the face of this planet. Yes, Man is important enough to be visited by His Creator. And planet earth is important enough to receive the imprint of the feet of God.

The infinite number of stars and planets in the heavens are there simply

to serve man both at night and in the day. He is that important in the sight of His Maker. This is why the Creator becomes the redeemer. Man is precious enough for God to love so much as to give His only-begotten Son that whosoever should believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Why look around for human life on other planets? Why do we find it hard to believe that human life could exist only on earth? Faith in Christ means to believe in the boundless love of God for man. If God can love a creature as physically infinitesimal as man and to die upon the Cross for him, then why is it a problem to accept that He makes earth the special object of His Love? The magnitude of Divine Love becomes ever more clear as we become increasingly aware of the smallness of man in respect to his physical size.

No other planets inhabited by humans could possibly add anything more to the unutterable Love that God has already shown by His creation of earth and His incarnation and crucifixion. If human life exists on a second planet, than an infinite number of planets are inhabited by humans. Why would God stop at two planets or three? But it would seem unnecessary and unbecoming for Divine Wisdom to prove Divine Love with more than one planet or a maximum number of inhabited planets. If we were to suppose for a moment that God willed that other planets be inhabited by man, why could He have not intended for man on his own effort to inhabit them with earth as home planet?

The Christian believer does not have to wait for space exploration to be convinced that there must be something mysteriously unique about man as part of an intelligent plan designed by a supreme Mind. Man's eternal salvation cannot

wait for science to complete its interminable course. Faith gives man an immediate glimpse of Truth which science takes a longer time to confirm.

For too many, however, science has become a substitute for faith. The man of our space age has turned planetary science into a cult by making it an end in itself (scientism). If only modern men of science were to have the wisdom of the three Magi of old. They who “worshipped the stars” in the East became the three Wise men who by means of the science of their day had discovered the newborn Savior. They shifted their devotion from the creaturely stars to the uncreated “Sun of Righteousness”. What scientific knowledge was theirs they used to discover the one and only true God and the only true adoration. Orthodox Christians express this truth in the Nativity Hymn:

Thy Birth, O Christ our God, has shone upon the world with the light of knowledge: for thereby they who worshipped the stars through a star were taught to worship Thee, the Son of Righteousness, and to know Thee the Dayspring from on high, O Lord, glory to Thee!

At the same time, with all the exuberance of the Nativity Season, we must never lose sight of the sobering fact that there will be a second appearance of our Divine Savior on earth. For the true Christian the festive excitement of the first Advent cannot push out the reality of His Second Advent with all of its awesome implications. Each Advent of Christ is preceded by a period of preparation. Although the hour and the day of each Advent remains unrevealed to man,

nevertheless, God does not startle man with each appearance of the Savior.

Do We Fear The Return of The Lord?

During the first Advent of Christ, He came as a baby in a manger. However, during the Second Advent, the whole world will see Him coming in the clouds as the Lord of Lords and King of Kings! **Too often, we think of the Return of Christ as some kind of**



dreadful event that terrifies us. As a result, we avoid the subject. We would rather not hear about it, nor even be reminded of it. It simply makes many people very uncomfortable when it is mentioned in Church. It is because of this fact that most priests and bishops refrain from making mention of the Second Coming of Christ in their sermons, articles and public statements.

How ironic! If we have a love relationship with Jesus, we should have every reason to feel joyful over His Return. If we truly love Him as our personal Savior and we have a close walk with Him, then that day of His appearance naturally will bring us untold joy. It makes no sense to fear that awesome day, if we have been enjoying His redeeming love and victory power. Our earthly life should

be basically a joyful anticipation of the coming of the Lord.

How can anyone possibly fear the One Who loves Him? How can anyone fear the One he or she loves? ***“Perfect love casts out fear. There is no fear in love. Because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love”*** (John 4:18).

Jesus loves us. How is it possible to fear His appearing if He loves us? Did He not die on the Cross and shed His precious blood for sinners out of

His infinite love for us? It is a sheer insult against Jesus not to love Him after He suffered the passion and was nailed to a Cross out of His love for us – to deliver us from eternal judgment and Hell.

The word of God says: “We love Him, because He first loved us.” Our love for Jesus makes it possible for us to face Him with joyful boldness at the time of His Return. It's love that makes us eager to meet Him in that last day. ***“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world”*** (1 John 4:17).

The Return of The One Who Loves Us

Our Lord Jesus Christ assures us that those who know Him and follow Him in faith and obedience that their names are written in Heaven. Isn't it wonderful that we can live with that assurance that during our lifetime we are in a state of salvation. This does not mean that we are perfect, but it means that, as members of the Body of Christ, reborn and sanctified and cleansed by the Blood of Jesus, we are coheirs of Christ.

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Why feel unsettled about the Return of Jesus, dear reader, when He has inscribed your name in the Lamb's Book of Life? If you are frightened over the prospect of facing Jesus, then definitely your relationship with Him is less than adequate. You possibly are lacking an awareness of Who Jesus is and what He has done for you. There is very likely sin in your life that you have not confessed for forgiveness.

Then there are some believers who have a faith relationship with Jesus, but not a love relationship. It is not enough to have faith and to believe in the Lord. The Bible says even the demons believe and in fact tremble because of their faith. But there is one thing they are incapable of doing, and that is to love the Lord Jesus Christ.

God requires His children a nuptial love for Jesus, since we believers collectively make up the Bride of Christ. We are now only betrothed to Him, but when He returns He will come to take His Bride with Him into Heaven. At that time the Marriage Supper of the Lamb will take place. The union of Christ with His chosen ones will be consummated.

There can be no real union with Christ without a mutual love. His love for us is unmistakable and unquestionable for us. He proved it on the Cross. Now He waits for our love, a love that should be unconditional. It is not a love that is determined by circumstances around us.

If you are going through a period of adversity and enduring distress, pain or misfortune, it does not mean that God no longer loves you. "Whom God loveth, He chastens." He allows His children to go through times of testing that can be very trying and painful.

To say God loves us does not mean He pampers us and makes certain that our lives will be comfortable and free of disappointments, frustrations and defeats. He never promised us that our lives would be a bed of roses, as long as we remain faithful to Him.

Through trials and tribulations our faith is put to a test and our trust in God

and in His wisdom and love is given a chance to be cultivated and to develop and grow. Since we are growing children, our character needs to be trained and shaped. Our Creator desires to mold us into His "image and likeness." If we are to reign with Christ, we must learn to suffer for Him and with Him in this present age.



The "prize of the high calling" is glorious and majestic. It is sitting on the throne of Christ. But the way to the throne is very often the Cross. The Lord never promised that our lives would be "peaches and cream," if we follow Him. On the contrary, He foretold unequivocally that we are to suffer afflictions after surrendering our lives to Him.

The true believer pays the price for going all the way with Jesus. When the martyrs in the early Church suffered in the torture chambers and ultimately shed their blood and died, do you think, dear reader, that they discarded their conviction that God still loves them? Do you believe for a moment that the early Christians who were being eaten by the lions in the Roman arena lost their love for Jesus or thought that His

love for them was, after all, just a myth?

Too many priests, bishops and theologians don't seem particularly concerned about the subject. We can see this, also, in the Roman Church and mainline Protestant churches. The so-called Fundamentalist churches, however, preach frequently on the Return of Jesus in glory. My own emphasis on the Second Advent has sometimes been criticized by some fellow-priests as apocalyptic sensationalism, and, in their overreaction, view with suspicion anything related to the book of Revelation and generally to the consummation of the age.

I want to emphasize that the event of the Second Advent is an essential part of the Gospel and of the very nature of the Church. It makes our relationship with Christ crucial and urgent. The Lord Himself affirmed this fact during His first Advent when He embarked on His earthly ministry with the call of repentance, because He declared, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

In summing up, the Return of Jesus in glory with the holy angel is a happy day for those who in this present age lived united with Him in a love relationship. The time has come when faith is not enough. The Lord requires love from those who are part of the Bride of Christ. He is returning to take with Him His small remnant – those who love Him and those who long for His appearance.

The Lord has reserved a crown that He desires to give – but only to those who long for His appearance in glory. He recognizes a special group of believers – a crown of righteousness. St. Paul spells it out distinctly: ***"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day – and not to me only, but to all them also that loves His appearing"*** (2 Tim. 4:6). Do you qualify for that special honor, dear reader?

A Message from Alex Kourtesis

Secretary-Treasurer



We would like to share with you this wonderful article from the Church Bulletin of Saint John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Sterling Heights, Michigan.

On behalf of St. John Youth, Many Thanks to "THE LOGOS MINISTRY" (Saint Symeon Ministry) for helping us to participate in the IONIAN VILLAGE, CROSS ROAD, & SUMMER CAMP last summer. MAY FR. EUSEBIUS' MEMORY BE ETERNAL.

A son and Grandson of priests, FATHER EUSEBIUS STEPHANOU was a great servant and teacher of the Greek Orthodox Church. He was a Theologian, as well as an Archimandrite of the Greek Orthodox Church. He was also my Uncle and spiritual Father. In addition to holding a number of pastorates and degrees, Father Eusebius became Professor and Sub-dean at The Holy Cross Seminary and later taught as an Orthodox Priest at Notre Dame University for 6 years. In 1968 he started The Logos Ministry in which he published many books and newsletters about the Orthodox Church, focusing on Spiritual Renewal and having a personal relationship with Jesus

Christ.

Soon after starting his ministry, Father was invited to speak in Greece and all around Europe and Africa as well as the states. Father Eusebius even had his own weekly Television Show that was broadcast around different parts of the world. About 4 years ago Father Eusebius went to be with the Lord, but his ministry is still active today. For the past number of years I have served as Secretary / Treasurer for Father Eusebius' ministry and continue to promote his mission which was to bring Orthodox Christians closer to the Lord Jesus Christ. To develop a relationship



with Christ, to put Christ first in our lives. To seek Christ first in all we do. To understand that we are all sinners and the only way to salvation is to repent, to turn away from our sins, and with the help and love from Jesus Christ, live a Godly, Spirit-filled, meaningful life. Having that assurance that Christ is with you always, no matter what circumstances come your way. Father encouraged Orthodox

Christians to read and to know the Bible and live It's teachings, not just on Sunday morning, but every day to be in The Word.

Recently we approached Father Nicholas and wanted to set up a program for the youth and to help them attend some of the Orthodox sponsored youth programs. We started with Ionian Village, Cross Road and some of the other local Summer Camps. We wanted to make the resources available for anyone who had an interest attending one of these camps and hoping they could experience a blessing from our Church. Last year our funds along with some other very generous donors, we were able to help out much of our youth to attend the Ionian Village, Cross Road and Summer Camp Experience. It was a great success and we hope to continue this next year and beyond. If you would like to be a part of this great cause, please ask Father Nicholas or any member of the Council or GOYA for more information.

For more information about Father Eusebius Stephanou and his Ministry, please visit us at www.stsymeon.org

All of us here at Saint Symeon's Ministry want to wish you and your loved ones a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

