



EPARCHY
OF ST. MARON
CANADA

***Fifteenth letter of His Excellency
Bishop Paul-Marwan Tabet
To the Maronite Community of Canada
Christmas 2020***

*To all the Monsignors, Priests and Brothers, Nuns and Sisters,
To all those people consecrated and committed to the life of the Church and the Society,
To all the Parents, Children, Young Men and Young Women,
To all the Parish Communities,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

“Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

Luke the Evangelist used the word "**today**" because God is an ever-present saviour. This is the true meaning of Christmas: God brings salvation to us!

In fact, if we reflect on what we are facing during this year, the question remains: Will He save us from the "COVID-19" pandemic?

What does the Lord save us from? Sickness, problems, daily life concerns, difficult circumstances that each of us face! These all are part of the salvation because salvation is ultimate and comprehensive. It touches upon the inner self.

The Christian doctrine teaches us that humanity, after being driven by their pride to commit the first sin, became in disharmony with God. God took pity on them and promised them a Savior. This Savior came indeed to restore peace between God and humanity, and to restore their original state that was lost by their sin. This savior was incarnated to deify humanity as stated in the teachings of the Church Fathers: "*God became man, so that man might become God*". Saint Augustine explains this statement as follows: "*This Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, appeared to stand between mortal sinners and the God who is immortal and just*". Therefore, Christ became the mediator between God and humanity, as explained by Paul the Apostle: "*For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as ransom for all*" (Timothy 2:5-6).

The spiritual fathers teach that the Nativity of Christ is identified through three states:

- a birth by nature (eternal before ages);
- a birth in the flesh (limited in place and time);
- a spiritual mystical birth (that occurs in the depths of the soul).

The below explanation shall help us prepare for the birth of the Child Jesus in our hearts.

1- The birth of Christ by nature: "*He was born of the Father before all ages*". This is what the Catholic doctrine teaches us: God is Trinitarian - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is what we proclaim in the Creed: "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father." This is a reality that Christ himself repeated more than once: "*He who sees Me sees the One who sent me*" (John 12:45).

2- **The birth of Christ in the flesh:** a place-bound birth that occurred two thousand years ago in a small village called Bethlehem. He was born of the Virgin Mary and experienced what we experience in this life from needs, hardships, fatigue, pain and joy. Christ was born in the flesh because he wanted to restore to humanity the grace that they selfishly lost and open for them the door to Heaven. That is why the angel called people to joy when he announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds: *“For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people. For today a Savior has been born to you, and he is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:10-11). In this sense, the Church invites its children to rejoice by ringing bells and singing. But it also invites us to feel the spiritual joy, which we will not rejoice unless Christ is born in our souls in a mystical spiritual manner.

3- **The Mystical Birth of Christ:** It is a birth through the teachings of Jesus and the Eucharist. And this where we comprehend that Christ took on flesh to be a living example of self-sacrifice for us, and to incite us to follow His example. He was born to consolidate peace between us, God, our souls and people.

What does celebrating Christmas mean to us “today”? To be reborn with Christ during this exceptional year and in light of the continuing coronavirus pandemic, where millions of people have been physically affected, but many have also been mentally, psychologically, socially and economically affected? What does it mean to us, "today" to be born while living with illness and death?

To be born with Him is:

1. To reconsider our priorities and personal commitments in this life while attending to our physical, spiritual and intellectual growth;
2. To return to the springs of our faith, emerging from His mystical body, to be living organs in which life flows.
3. To value the gift of the Sacrament of the Eucharist that we lived by means of screens and social media due to this year’s obstacles;
4. To leave everything behind for Him: our habits, our assurances and our personal convictions in order to be humanized and deified so that the image and the example be the same;
5. To reconsider our family obligations in order to make our families and our societies home churches where development and advancement flourish;
6. To examine our spiritual commitments and to be stand by the side of the people we love and those in need, not only for material matters, but for a gesture of attention, compassion or sympathy.

The Nativity of Christ invites us to renew hope in God’s promise *“for in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?”* (Romans 8:24). This year is a perfect example of what we can consider as a global surprise or an unexpected unknown: A *“lethal epidemic”* that demonstrates to us the fragility and the uncertainty of earthly matters, that brings us back to the greatness of the Creator. It is a call for us to be reborn with God or to remain living according to our laws and volatile systems.

Oh God, Child of the manger, come and settle in our souls, so they would rejoice a spiritual joy that dispels the bitterness and the loneliness we are feeling, and would restore tranquility and peace within us.

**The Savior is born... Halleluiah!
MERRY CHRISTMAS!**

**+Paul-Marwan TABET
Bishop**