

Christmas Message

The Year of Our Lord 2022

Bishop Kurt Burnette

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

My dear friends,

This year at Christmas, a major part of our brothers and sisters in the Byzantine Catholic Church, or as we are called in Europe, the Greek Catholic Church, are living in a country at war with enemy missiles and war jets and the new horror--deadly drones flying overhead. Under these skies, they are taking time, as we are, to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. We call Him the Prince of Peace because the most high God Himself, speaking through his prophet Isaiah told us, He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

On Christmas Day, one hundred and fifty eight years ago, war was raging here in the United States. Henry Longfellow was seated by the bed of his severely wounded son Charles, and did not know if his son would live. Hearing the bells from the churches, Longfellow wrote his painful poem asking, how can we sing "Peace on earth, good will to men!", and how can we call Jesus "The Prince of Peace"? After all, the United States was almost entirely Christian, many of the settlers came expressly to practice their Christian faith without interference. Yet in a war entirely of their own making, six hundred thousand Americans died at the hands of each other. Longfellow writes, "and in despair I bowed my head; 'There is no peace on earth,' I said; 'For hate is strong, and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men!'" Yet he says in the last verse that in the persistent peal of the bells, more loud and deep, he heard the words, "God is not dead; nor doth he sleep! The Wrong shall fail, the Right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to men!"

A century and a half later, the Christmas bells draw us back to our churches, where we renew our Faith and our Hope by the grace of almighty God. We come together, and in the singing, surrounded by beautiful icons—windows into heaven, our prayers for peace rise up with the incense to the throne of God. We confess our own sins and ask for mercy, and ask God to touch the hearts of others who are most in need of His mercy.

We renew our Faith that tells us these truths: we are each made in the image and likeness of God. We each share by our very creation in God's beauty, in His justice, in His power to create, in His power to love, and in His power to forgive. God is the master of history, not the men who seem powerful in this world. And at the end, God will judge the living and the dead, each one according to his or her works. The Last Word belongs to God.

We renew our Hope because Jesus Christ conquered death and conquered sin and evil. Our Christian Hope is about the present and the future. Speaking again through His prophet Isaiah, God says, though your sins are as scarlet, I will make you as white as snow. Jesus said, I go ahead of you to prepare a place for you; my Father's house has many mansions. At every Divine Liturgy, we profess openly our Hope: I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. So be it.

Finally, as we are drawn to church by the bells of Christmas, we ask God to renew our Charity, our Christian Love. As God loved us, even in our sins, He took on our flesh and was born of a woman. We ask for the grace to love each other, sinners as we are, and even pray for our enemies as Jesus taught us. The Prince of Peace told us, if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Even the nonbelievers do that. I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

See! Your King comes to you, humble and welcoming. Just as the angels in the sky invited the shepherds in the field to come worship the new born King in his humble state, we hear the church bells and hasten to our churches to adore the new born child in his mother's arms. The flesh and blood that He took from His mother, He gives to us in our Holy Communion this Christmas Day.

My prayer for each of you, my dear friends, is this: that you find Christ in your heart and make him your King in the throne of your soul. That He give to you this Christmas a renewed Faith in His particular love for you. That He renew your Hope in His plan for you and renew your Hope in your heavenly reward. And that He reignite in your heart the Divine Love which conquers hate and darkness. May your New Year be a year of light, joy, and peace—peace in your heart, peace in your family, peace with your friends, and peace in the world.

Come to us, oh Prince of Peace!