

Nativity Epistle 2012

Beloved brothers and sisters, faithful sons and daughters of Christ's Church, my dear Christians,

At this time of year almost the whole world celebrates Christmas. For the majority it is just some kind of carnal and commercial bacchanalia celebrated with an excessive consumption of food and drink, and the exchange of gifts, and which just happens to have origins associated with an historically influential, but now forgotten, visionary and teacher of an ancient, or at least outmoded, world. There are, however, still some who acknowledge the importance and profundity of Christ's moral teachings and their continued influence in raising the level of the moral life of mankind.

For us Christians, however, Christmas, the Nativity of Christ, has a completely different, incomparable, even absolute, significance. Through the course of history there have been many moral, religious and social teachers and visionaries, some greater than others, some more influential, others less. Although Christ was also a teacher, and indeed the greatest, and His moral, spiritual and social teachings, as laid out in the Gospel, carry for us an absolute authority, this is not what we are celebrating. As Christians, we celebrate the incarnation of the very Son of God, that the Lord God Himself became man through the most pure Virgin, and came not just to teach and instruct, but to save. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved (John 3.16-17).

It was not just a teacher, or another prophet, or preacher that was born, but a Saviour, the Son of God Himself. That God Himself takes on a human nature is a turning point for the whole tragic history of fallen mankind. That God Himself partakes fully in human nature is the culmination of the sacred history of God's relationship to mankind. This is the most glorious moment of the entirety of human existence, it is what all humanity starting from Adam had been waiting for, that to which all the prophets had led.

The Lord Himself, out of His ineffable love for mankind, became man to partake in humanity, and He built His Church as His mystical Body for humanity to partake of Divinity, that in this Church the mystery of the communion of Divinity with humanity continue until the end of time.

Brothers and sisters, do not be deceived, Christ founded one Church, in which He is incarnate, which is His Mystical Body, in which the Divine and human commune. In her there is salvation. She stands and will stand until the end of time. That which people build alongside her, in imitation of her, is not the Church, is not the Body of Christ. It is a new foundation, and not a continuation of the mystery of Bethlehem, and in it there is no salvation.

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

John, Bishop of Caracas and South America