



International Communion of the Charismatic Episcopal Church

*Patriarch's Office
50 Saint Thomas Place
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The Patriarch's Christmas Message

For me, the real proclamation of Christmas is “His name will be called Emmanuel,” that is, “God with us.” This is not, of course, the first time the Scriptures record the presence of God among His people. God appeared to Adam in the garden, making it clear from the beginning of the story that God wants to be among us. He appears to Abraham in an angelic visitation as the Trinity. Then again, He appears to Moses and invites all the Hebrew people to come and dwell with Him as He dwells with them. The Tent of Meeting, which eventually becomes the Temple in Jerusalem, is about God being with us. Then why is the story of the Nativity so important? It is because Emmanuel is now a human embryo, a human infant, a human child, a human young adult in the Temple, a human teacher, a human healer, a human who, ultimately, not only enters into our life but into our death and conquers death to bring about eternity with God in His Kingdom. It is about God who sits upon the throne as a human. Jesus takes humanity not only into the throne room but sits upon the throne. Jesus is the human and divine God - One God. And a human is coming back to judge the living and the dead. Humanity and Divinity are one in Jesus, so that we, who are human, can share/participate in His Divinity.

I understand that I need to remind people of the dangers of materialism and consumerism that are so obvious during the holiday season in the Western World. At the same time, I am reminded that after years of giving people a reminder, along with those in the highest levels of religious leadership, including the Pope, it has done little to impact people's behavior during this season. Starting sometime in November, or even late October, folks in the West have decorated their homes with lights, put up the traditional tree, begun preparing for various Christmas parties, and above all have pulled out credit cards or saved cash and spend, spend, spend, on gifts for spouse, children, and grandchildren. Service people look to the Christmas Season to receive “tips” or “gratuities” from their clients with which they will often meet end-of-the-year expenses or pay for their own Christmas feasts. Billions of dollars will be spent. And those billions not only supply gifts but employ people in retail, manufacturing, shipping, the hospitality industry, and the travel industry. Most of their profits will be made between late November and December 25. (In the Philippines, this starts sometime in August. It is amazing.)

Of course, most of the Christian world will not take part in this rampant materialism and consumerism. Poverty and survival will be the same issue on Christmas morning as on Christmas Eve and will be on the day after Christmas. Over 689 million people live on less than \$1.90 a day. Though this figure since the 1990s has decreased, the pandemic has caused an increase of 97 million. This is what we know as extreme



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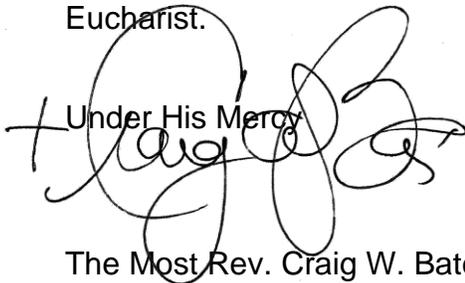
poverty. But there are also millions of those who live near the poverty line or just above the poverty line with no water, electricity, inadequate medical care, sewage, and education. Even in the United States, there are 34 million people who live below the poverty line, many of whom are single mothers and children (the poorest of those in America) or the elderly.

I have heard it repeatedly said that Jesus came to the poor. Yes, he did, but he also came to the rich and everyone in between. He came among the poor as He came among the Jews, but He also came to bring redemption to every person. He came to redeem and restore His father's creation. He came to be God with all of us.

I think it is important that Jesus came among the poor. It emphasizes the message of grace as a freely given gift, which is something we all need to hear and receive. I think it is important that we understand the humility and obedience revealed to us in Jesus. That God conquers sin, evil, and death in a power far greater than any weapon ever formed or will be formed. The victory is in the humble obedience of the cross. This is love revealed forever. This is the love that will conquer evil, violence, and hatred. It is this love that will expose the horrors of racism, abortion, child sex traffic, slave labor, and all that robs humanity of its dignity. It is this humble and obedient love that will meet with us in our suffering but also transform us out of our sin, our addictions, or mental/emotional struggles and give us new life with purpose and meaning. This is Jesus.

It is also this love that is born and comes to us, again and again, in the Holy Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church. The Holy Spirit manifests Himself in the gifts that operate among us to move forward His Kingdom, but also to make known to us the real presence of Jesus under the elements of Bread and Wine. It is here that we proclaim His death until He returns, but also that we meet Him over and over again. We meet the One of the Cross who holds the Universe together and makes sense of everything through His love.

Have a blessed Christmas season. In all the glitz and glitter, the music, the parties, and the festivities, may you find time to spend with Jesus in prayer, in Scripture, and in the Eucharist.

Under His Mercy


The Most Rev. Craig W. Bates,
Patriarch, International Communion of the Charismatic Episcopal Church