

# **Christmas Message to Pemptousia (Archimandrite Elisiaios, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras)**

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Dear Readers,

The feast of Christmas has come round again, and, according to [the Greek writer] Alexandros Papadiamantis, 'if Easter is the brightest of the Christian feasts, Christmas is the most moving'. In both the Vigil for 25 December and in the Divine Liturgy on that day, we'll hymn and recreate this great event of the Nativity and Incarnation of God the Word, Who, for our sakes became like us and mingled with us. Christmas has, in fact, become a source of inspiration in all areas of the spirit and of culture. The prophets in the Old Testament foretold the event, the New Testament describes it in terms of unsurpassed conciseness, the holy fathers and theologians delve into its content in incomparable fashion, the hymnographers and composers have woven superlative hymns of praise, authors have written exceptional narratives, stories and poetry, philosophers have been inspired by the mystery, while lay piety has experienced it through worship, traditions and customs. All of this comes together and represents an untold, precious treasury regarding 'the mystery concealed from the ages', but which is in the possession of all people, of the whole world, and of each and every person separately. The key to finding this treasure is simply our willingness to search.



Of course, the secularization of our times has detracted from the essential nature of the feast, has broken the link between the events of the festive period and their sacramental source, and so the ecclesiastical content and meaning of Christmas has been overshadowed. And yet, for those who want to experience Christmas in a spiritual way and love doing so, or who cleanse their heart with the pure and spotless meaning of the hymns, the advent of Christmas is always a 'here and now'. Such people always anticipate and long to hear both the message of the angels: 'Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which is for all the people, that today a saviour has been born to you, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David'; and, at the same time, the praise sung to God: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will among people'. Everyone wants to open their heart, without hesitation or thoughts of doubt, to imitate the shepherds, to recognize the voice of the angels, to submit to the divine message, to run and venerate our great God as a poor infant, as a new-born child, in a lowly manger. In the most beautiful manger of this wearisome world.

The soul that longs for God is also willing to hear, to enter more deeply into the mystery and to attend to the voice of Saint John Chrysostom when he says: 'Today He Who is, is born and becomes what He was not. As God, He has become human, though not departing from His being as God. He became human not by departing

from His divinity, nor through any increase did He become God from being human. As the Word, He became flesh, His nature, because of impassability, remaining unchanged’.

But the truest birth of Christ takes place within our hearts, as our niptic Fathers experienced it, described it and passed it on to us. ‘The Word of God, Who was then born in the flesh in Bethlehem, is, out of love for us, willingly born in the Spirit for those who desire this. And He becomes an infant and takes shape within them through the virtues. And He appears inasmuch as the person concerned is able to see Him. Seeing the power of this mystery, Saint Paul says: “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and unto the ages”, because he knows that the mystery is always new and never grows old, when it’s experienced in the intellect’ (Saint Maximos the Confessor).

In one of his talks, Elder Aimilianos of Simonos Petras said: ‘Today it’s as if we ourselves are being born. After the death from the Fall, Christ gives birth today to all of us. It’s the beginning of our true life, the beginning of our spiritual persona, of our eternal life’.

Through His birth, Christ, in a way, gives birth to and personifies His capacities, the fruits of His spirit: humility, faith, joy, peace, self-denial, sacrifice, selflessness, reconciliation, righteousness, mercy and, above all, love, all the gifts that Saint Paul refers to. And all these qualities are personified in Christ.

But our incarnate God gives to all of us the opportunity to give birth to these virtues: faith, joy, hope, peace, reconciliation, selflessness, sacrifice, fraternity, tolerance, righteousness and, above all, love which is long-suffering, doesn’t envy, is comely, forgets injury, shares and rejoices in the happiness of others, is tolerant, trusting, hopeful in all things and patient in all things. Love will never fail. With Christ’s coming to earth, the virtues, particularly faith, hope, salvation, love, repose and eternity now have a name which is none other than ‘Lord Jesus Christ’. He Himself is our hope, our being.

In a topical article, Archimandrite Theodosios Manolis, an oncologist and theologian notes that we cannot 'speak about Christmas if we cut out from our lives the essential meaning of the incarnation, which is love. A love which... has nothing to do with matter, but with the heart. It has nothing to do with money but with the experience of faith. As was the case with the little girl in the story of "Gift to Christ", who had nothing else to give the new-born Christ in the manger except some poor, dried up twigs, which were, however, the most important gifts He received that day'.

Finally, the most tangible expression of the experience of the Nativity of Christ is eloquently articulated in the katavasia of the ninth ode of the Christmas canon: 'I see a strange and wondrous mystery. Heaven- the cave; the Cherubic throne- the Virgin; the manger- the place where Christ, the uncontainable God lay, Whom we magnify in praise'.

Our participation in this mystery presupposes our zeal, our love, our giving, our persistence in the struggle, our effort, and our patience in trials. 'Nature laboured' it says. And Christ was born. So it is that we come into the world through the pains of labour. Without effort and pain, it's not possible for a soul to exist. Christ is continually being born. He's born within the darkness of the passions of the soul, within the silence of the heart, because no-one can know the struggle, the contest, the anxiety, and the cries which are emitted from the heart so that Christ can be born there. Night and day. No-one can know the desire of the soul, the prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ, come and abide in us', can know the strange wonder worked in people, which is accomplished by the grace of the incarnate Christ.

Dear readers, may Christ be born every day in people's hearts.

We've all heard the unique, glad tidings of the coming of the Messiah, the completion of the plan of divine dispensation through the incarnation of the Saviour of the world. We've all received the invitation to venerate the divine Infant. We're all called. Those who experience the mystery with fervour become God's elect, 'children for adoption'.

And from the day in history when Christ was born until our own, mostly ill-omened time, it's the saints who've been God's elect. The saints, who always humbly venerated Christ and constantly, through painful struggles, asceticism and prayer, cleansed the cave of their heart, so that they could give birth to Christ and then bear Him. Their desire, their life and their example show us the way, the manner and the experience of the supernatural wonder, they open to us gates of Eden and

reveal to us the delights of Paradise 'within the cave'.

If, in the days and years in which we live, Christ is born within our heart, the wish for 'Many Happy Returns' is good, full of meaning and worth making.

Merry Christmas and an auspicious New Year.