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Archpastoral Letter for the Feast of the Nativity 2019

Protocol Number 01-006/2019

Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord

Dearly Beloved of Our Diocesan Family:

Christ is Born! – Let us glorify Him!

**“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we beheld His glory, the glory of the Only-Begotten
of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).**

When John the Baptist first pointed Christ out to the prophet’s then-disciples, Andrew and John asked Jesus, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” And He said to them, “*Come and see*” (John 1:38). It is natural when we meet someone, whose personality impresses us, to want to see more of him, to learn more about him, to be with him in his own setting – where he lives. So it was with John and Andrew in St. John’s Gospel. Wanting to know Our Lord better, they asked to see where He lived. Knowing their purpose, Christ invited them to “Come and see.” He asked them to spend the rest of the day with Him, and they did. They found Him ... dwelling in peace and love, humble in spirit, preaching truth and offering forgiveness ... and they chose to stay with Him, to become His first followers, His first disciples.

The question John and Andrew asked of Jesus is one which so many of us direct to God today: “Master, where do you live? Where can we find you?” The atheist believes, because he cannot see God, that He doesn’t exist. The agnostic isn’t sure what to look for or how to realize the meaning of what is revealed to him. Even believers sometimes ask, “Why is God so far away?” The best reply one can receive to that question is: “If God seems far away, who moved? God hasn’t moved; He is where He always has been ... it is you who have moved!” And, indeed, it is up to us to make the next move back to Him.

Because, on this very day of our celebration of His Nativity, God Himself answers the question, “Where can we find Thee?” ... in the Mystery of the Incarnation. One blessed night 2,000 years ago, an event planned from all eternity took place: the All-Powerful God became a helpless Child. In the stillness and obscurity of the little town of Bethlehem, the Lord of Glory came to earth to reveal Himself to men. Think of it: Man was able to see and touch and kiss the very face of God! People were able to know and experience and love the Lord as they never were before! Immanuel was really here: God with us! For 33 years of human history, it was possible to point to Our Lord in the flesh and say, “There is God!” He was the One who taught the final word of the Revelation of God. It was He who made the blind see, the deaf hear, the cripple walk and the dead rise. It was He who healed the broken and forgave the sinner.

But after His Passion and Death, His Burial and Resurrection, He ascended into Heaven, and returned to His rightful place at the right hand of His Father, and we were left with the question, “Where can we find Thee now?” Certainly pointing to the consecrated Bread and Wine in the Mystery of Holy Communion, He says to us, “*Come and see ... This is My Body ... This is My Blood ... He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me and I live in Him.*” (Matthew 26:26,28; John 6:54,56)

Master, where do you live? Come and see, He says, as He also invites us to look into ourselves, into our own souls. It is there that He has chosen to dwell. *“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,”* said St. Paul (Ephesians 3:17). The word used is “dwell” ... not pay an occasional visit. He wants to settle down there, to live there all year long. He Who had “nowhere to lay His head” seeks to *make His home in us!* This is why He has chosen to come to us so simply in the form of bread and wine. *“Abide in Me, and I in you”* (John 15:4).

Master, where do you live? *In you!* ... He tells us ... You have been fashioned to contain God! He wants to take up residence in us. He has claimed us as His children. He will not rest until He has captured our heart and made it His throne. Only because we are candidates for Heaven and God’s Presence are we different. Take that away, and we are as common as the grave. But let God in, and we have let all of Heaven in ... the power, the peace, the love, the joy ... yes, all of Heaven’s riches become our riches.

Master, where do you live? Way up in Heaven somewhere? Indeed, not! More than 3,000 years ago, God said of the Hebrews: *“My dwelling place shall be with them; I will be their God, and they shall be My people”* (Exodus 37:27). Centuries later, the Psalmist David would write, *“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust”* (Psalm 90:1-2). If we can make time to dwell quietly in the presence of God each day, He will dwell in us and we shall have the power to live life victoriously.

Master, where do you live? Christ Himself tells us with His precious lips, *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We shall come to him and make our home with him”* (John 14:23).

My friends, where do we live? Do we live in fear, or in hostility, or in sin? No matter where we live now, we can change our address. We can move to a better environment. The Prodigal Son changed his address. Once he came to himself, he was no longer content to live with the swine. He got up and returned to his father; he moved; he changed his address. In our very world today there are some living in the gutter, searching for happiness where it is impossible to find it. Our Father is in the Palace, waiting for us. He wants us to live with Him in the palace of love and forgiveness, understanding and perfect peace. But it is up to us to make the move to Him. Call it conversion, call it repentance; it is moving, it is changing our address.

If Satan were to knock at the door of our heart and ask, Who lives here? – we should reply, I used to, but I have moved out ... the Lord now lives here. In the words of St. Paul, *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life that I live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself up for me”* (Galatians 2:20).

On this Glorious Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord, we find God Incarnate in the manger of Bethlehem ... for He has come to bring us salvation, to take us to the Kingdom, to give us everlasting life. Let us commit ourselves anew this day to follow the example of the first disciples, Andrew and John. Let us be where the Lord is, and stay with Him. Isn’t this the key to it all? Always to be with the Lord, He Who said, *“Behold I am with you always, even to the very end of the world”* (Matthew 28:20) ... to let Him live in us? *“Abide in Me, and I in you.”* This, my beloved, is the beginning of Heaven ... right here, right now.

Praying the Infant Messiah will bestow the choicest of blessings upon you and your loved ones, I remain

With my humble prayers, archpastoral blessing and sincere love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Archbishop Michael". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Archbishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey