
Warje Malwadi and the SEVA Kids in Pune. I myself will be in our mission in Kamagiri on 23 December and in Warje Malwadi on Christmas Day. I will celebrate the Christmas Liturgy with our St Antony's Parish, Vishranthwadi-Pune.

Let each parish of our Exarchate share the joy of Christmas with our brethren of the neighbourhood through Christmas Carols, Ecumenical Christmas Celebrations and above all through organized acts of love sharing Christmas meals with the marginalized and the poor. The SEVA programme, "Zero Tolerance to Hunger Campaign" can be a Christmas gift to the needy around us. "On this day a gift, Jesus, came out to us without our asking for it; let us then give alms to those who cry out and beg from us" (St Ephrem, Nativity Hymn I, 95).

Christmas cannot be restricted to the celebration of a day and to the Christmas Liturgy. Jesus is born every day in us, in the Holy Qurbonos celebrated in all the Altars across the world. When we receive His Body and Blood in the Holy Qurbono, he is born in our hearts! Every Holy Qurbono is a Christmas for us! So the celebration of Christmas should extend beyond the experience of the Liturgy on 25 December to our day to day life!

I wish you all a Blessed Christmas! May the grace of the Divine Child of Bethlehem lead us to a Prosperous New Year 2018!

May God bless you all abundantly! May all these be fulfilled through the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and of all Apostles, especially the Blessed Apostle St Thomas our Guardian, and all the saints, especially St Ephrem the Patron of our Exarchate!

Your humble servant in the service of the Lord,



✠ **Thomas Mar Anthonios OIC**

Apostolic Exarch, Exarchate of St Ephrem

Khadki-Pune

1 December 2017.

This pastoral letter shall be read in all parishes and mission centres during the Holy Qurbono on Sunday, 10 or 17 December 2017.

*By the Grace of God and the favour of the Holy See
and in communion with Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis,
the Father and Head of the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church
and its Holy Episcopal Synod*

*From the Apostolic Exarch of the Exarchate of St Ephrem, Khadki-Pune,
Aboon Thomas Mar Anthonios Metropolitan
Blessings to the Priests, the Religious, the Seminarians and the Faithful
in the jurisdiction of the Exarchate!*



Prot. No. PL 2017/02

Dear Rev. Fathers, Religious, Seminarians and beloved Faithful,

We have begun our preparations for one more Christmas! The miracle of God becoming man in the manger of Bethlehem is solemnly celebrated all over the world. The love of God to send His only begotten Son into the world to save the humankind is commemorated in Christmas Season. Christmas is a celebration of wonders; the Creator becomes a creature; God becomes a man; the womb of a Virgin bears the Saviour; a Holy Virgin becomes the Mother of God; the shepherds visit the Saviour according to the message of the Angel; and the Wise Men come from the East! "Today a child was born, and he was called "wonder", for it is a wonder that God reveals Himself as an infant" (St Ephrem, Hymn on Nativity I, 90). When we celebrate one more Christmas, let us meditate on these wonders.

Christmas in the Womb of the Holy Virgin Mary

If Christmas is the celebration of a wonder, of God taking the form of a human being, the first Christmas wonder is the moment "the Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14) in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The wonder of the Holy Virgin transforming into the Mother of God is ungraspable for the human mind. (Sedro, Evening Prayer – Christmas). But her total submission to the will of God enables her to hold the Creator of the universe in the feebleness of her tiny womb. By the grace of God, she delivers the Infant Jesus and nurses him in her bosom.

The Christmas that happened in the womb of the Virgin Mary should happen in the inner hearts of our daily life. “Great is the glory of this day above all days; and glorious is the beauty of this feast above all feasts. Today the strengthener has come for all who are infirm; He takes hold and erects, strengthens and feeds by His diligence” (St Jacob of Sarug)

Christmas in the life of the Shepherds

The Angel of the Lord announced to the shepherds, “Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (Lk 2:10-12). This made them go to Bethlehem and adore Jesus in all His limitations. The Saviour was born in a cattle shed. He was wrapped in worn cloth and laid in the manger. The shepherds believed the words of the angel. They adored the Baby as the Saviour seeing the signs predicted by the Angel. “The infant that lay down in the small manger among the poor, while the fiery ranks with their legions tremble before Him. The Son of the Rich One wished to dwell among the poor, and He opened His treasury and showed His riches upon those in need” (St Jacob of Sarug).

In our daily life, Jesus is born in the mangers around us. He is born into the limitations of human beings. We have to listen to the voice of the angel inside us. The angel will guide us through signs. He is born very near to us: in a poor home, in an orphanage or on the streets. We have to open our eyes to the presence of Jesus around us. We are wandering around to have a glimpse of Jesus. Many times we miss the experience of Jesus in the poor, in the afflicted, in the marginalized, in the sick, in the hungry and in those who live in the peripheries of our society. Our Christmas celebrations become meaningful when we find Jesus in them and when we adore Jesus through them. Let us not forget the words of Jesus himself, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

Christmas for the Wise Kings from the East

St Ephrem sang on Christmas day, “On this day on which the Lord of all came among servants, let the lords also bow down to their servants lovingly. On this day when the Rich One was made poor for our sake, let the rich man also make the poor man a sharer at his table” (Hymn on Nativity, I: 93, 94).

The Wise Kings took up a journey towards Bethlehem in search of the Saviour who is born in the city of David. A star in the sky showed them the way to the Saviour. Even though they were travelling looking at the star, when they saw the castle of Herod, they left the star and deviated the way. But when they understood their mistake, they came out of the palace and looked at the sky. The star was still there to show them the way to Jesus.

God has arranged many stars in our lives to show us the way to Jesus. Most of the time, we follow the star. But on the way, when we encounter castles of temptation, we deviate from our journey towards Lord Jesus. We search Jesus in the midst of his rivals; but he is safe in the manger surrounded by Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, the animals and the angels. Christmas has to be a search for the Jesus in the manger; a journey towards the Bethlehem of our societies carrying gold, frankincense and myrrh to offer at the feet of the poor. Let our search be fulfilled! In this Christmas, let the Baby Jesus be born in our hearts; let our eyes be opened to see Jesus who is present around us; let us embark on a spiritual journey to find him and adore him!

The Christmas of Reconciliation

Christmas is a time of reconciliation. God reconciled himself to humankind through the birth of Jesus. “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14). That is why St Ephrem in his Christmas hymn sings: “This is the night of reconciliation; let us be neither wrathful nor gloomy on it. On this all-peaceful night let us be neither menacing nor boisterous” (Hymn I, 88).

Let us prepare sacramentally to celebrate Christmas worthily. Let us be reconciled with God and our brethren so that Jesus is born in us, in our families and communities and through us in the world. Let us prepare ourselves receiving the grace through the sacrament of reconciliation. I am sure that our Parish Priests will make special arrangements for this in our Parishes as usual.

This year, as we celebrate Christmas, we, at the Exarchate level, will be sharing the joy of Christmas with our brethren in our Bapatla Mission, with the people of the villages of Kamagiri, our mission in