

## **“The Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”**

Today, as we celebrate Christmas, we pray for the families of the Egyptian martyrs who lost their loved ones in the terrorist attacks last year. We also pray for divine protection from all evil powers for our beloved country Egypt.

We also remember our Palestinian brothers and sisters and pray for them; that they may get to live in an independent State with Eastern Jerusalem as its capital. We cry out to the Lord of justice to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinians, Yemenis and Syrians. We fix our eyes on the Prince of Peace, and ask that He grant His peace to all the peoples of the region.

During the last few weeks, we observed Advent, and during this time, we meditated on the prophecies that were made by the Old Testament prophets about the birth of Jesus Christ. We also meditated on the circumstances in which the people lived at that time. We reflected on how we can prepare our hearts for the second coming of Christ.

Today, we celebrate Christmas, which is the first coming of Jesus, while our hearts long for His second coming. If we compare the contexts in which Jesus was born with the current context where we live now, we will find lots of similarities between the two.

Prophet Isaiah prophesied about the birth of Christ saying, **“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined.”** Isaiah 9:2 (NKJV) and added, **“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”** Isaiah 9:6 (NKJV)

The darkness that was mentioned by Isaiah is the darkness of evil that the people of Israel lived in. They had rebelled against God and worshipped other gods. It is also the darkness of being distant from God. The ‘shadow of death’ means that they have lost the meaning of life because their sins separated them from God. They needed a Saviour to save them from their sins. They also needed reconciliation with God. That’s why God, in His mercy and love, shone on them when Christ was born to save them and reconcile them to God. However, the people did not realise that Jesus had come, and John described this in this way, **“<sup>9</sup>That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. <sup>11</sup>He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”** John 1:9-11 (NKJV).

Let us now reflect on the beginning of the story of Christmas which we just read in the Gospel reading today. It tells us that God sent His angel, Gabriel, to the Virgin Mary to announce the birth of Christ. It is said that the Virgin was a teenager with her age not exceeding 16 years. She was engaged. It seems that this was the first time for her to see an angel. That’s why she was

afraid and perplexed when the angel said to her, **“Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!”** Luke 1:28 (NKJV). Then the angel tried to reassure her and calm her down by saying, **“<sup>30</sup>...Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. <sup>33</sup> And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”** Luke 1:30-33 (NKJV)

My beloved, this divine message which was carried by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin came to fulfill the prophecy made by the prophet Isaiah 800 years before the birth of Christ. **“<sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”** Isaiah 7:14 (NKJV).

No doubt the message of the angel to Mary was difficult to comprehend, strange and quite shocking. **“<sup>34</sup> Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?””** Luke 1:34 (NKJV).

I am sure that the Virgin realized how serious it would be if she conceived without marriage. All the people would look at her as an adulteress that deserved to be stoned to death according to the Law of Moses. While she was thinking of how she would deal with this scandal, the angel clarified how this was going to happen, by saying, **““The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”** Luke 1:35 (NKJV).

I don't think that this clarification that was made by the angel to Mary was helpful to her understanding of how she could conceive while she was still a virgin. What did it mean that 'the Holy Spirit will come upon' her and what it means that 'the power of the Highest will overshadow' her? However, Mary believed God's message to her and she said, **“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”** Luke 1:38 (NKJV)

She believed and surrendered to the will of God without knowing what's going to happen to her and what was going to happen to the whole of humanity as a result of this surrendering and trust in the Word of God. I love the song that says:

Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?  
Mary did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?  
Did you know that your baby boy has come to make us new?  
This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver us.

Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?  
Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?  
Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?  
And when you kiss your little baby, you have kissed the face of God.

My beloved, the most important thing we need today is to have the trust and willingness to surrender like Mary even if we don't know where God is leading us or what's going to happen to us in the future.

When we say with Virgin Mary, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be to me according to your word", we will be able to also sing with her,

My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup> And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

<sup>48</sup> For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;  
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

<sup>49</sup> For He who is mighty has done great things for me,  
And holy *is* His name.

<sup>50</sup> And His mercy *is* on those who fear Him  
From generation to generation.

My beloved, it is the faith and obedience of Virgin Mary that helped her to experience the joy, the salvation and the reconciliation in the person of Jesus Christ. So I invite you to open your hearts to Christ and to surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit in order to experience His salvation and to realise that He is our loving friend in this earthly journey.

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