

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST IS OUR BIRTH

Another words on our troubled life, from those days when Father Matta lived in solitude in the desert of Wadi al-Rayyan. His meditations are pure, simple, yet profound for us, to lead us deep in our meditation on the Nativity. Enjoy! NB: All quotations are taken from the NKJV, if not otherwise mentioned.

DEAR FATHERS of *Wādī al-Rayyān*.¹ Peace from God and grace and blessing in Christ, the Redeemer and Savior of your souls!

Just as ever since we have sinned against God, the world had been looking forward to receiving the birth of Christ, so every one of us now looks forward to receiving Christ every time he or she sins against God. Christ came to rectify our course of life permanently and perpetually toward God. We always commit sins against God, but Christ is now ever-present to rectify our transgression. Christ is ever ready to restore the rectitude of the relationship that binds us to God, substantiate the feeling of renewal, and secure the ultimate aim of our existence. God actualizes all this by proving His divine existence within the very depths of our consciousness.

However, just as the world was growing in its readiness to receive the birth of Christ, it was also growing in its lack of readiness to believe in Him. This is so because the world contained and still contains intrinsic fundamental powers that defy God, which are the powers represented by the Prince of this world. It is those powers that hold sway over our passions and egotistic ambitions. They suggest to our mind to aspire to dissoluteness and the lust for power. They also beguile us to exist independently of God, far from His commandments and statutes.

Within every one of us, even when we grow in our submission to God and faith, there remain in us wrong inclinations and whims of egoistic ambitions growing alongside the passage of time and the activity of the world. We may yield to the enticement of aspiring to sinful freedom and an impure lifestyle away from the holy commandments of God. However, the birth of Christ into the world puts a limit to the tyranny of our cunningness. Now there exists Him who reproaches the world for its waywardness and overwhelming sway. Likewise, our birth in Christ sets a limit to the tyranny and arrogance of our passions and selfish ambition. It tames our wild nature and pricks our conscience unrelentingly for every word or deed that is in discord with the new life the Holy Spirit lavishes bountifully upon us as men and women of God.

Christ was not born into the world to stay in the world, for He is not originally of the world (cf. John 8:23). He was born to the world that the world might exist in Him. Therefore, we cannot see Christ in the world or the company of the world, which means that it is of no use fooling ourselves by

¹ *Wādī al-Rayyān* is a natural reserve and valley located 153 kms south of Cairo. This location was a suitable monastic dwelling due to its stillness. Cf. Otto Meinardus, "The Hermits of Wādī Rayān," *Studia Orientalia Christiana* 11 (1966): 293-317.

attempting to recognize Him, feel Him, submit to Him, or even believe in Him while we live in the realm of this world with its thoughts, pleasures, ambitions, getting along with the world, currying its favor and seeking its affection. However, the moment we exit the realm of this world and become unshackled from its thoughts, pleasures, and ambitions, the moment we sacrifice its affection and favor and head directly toward God with our innermost self, we will immediately find Christ, recognizing Him and feeling His presence in an exceptional fashion. This is usually bolstered by a transcendent power and by gifts that overflow in abundance, making up for any loss exacted upon us by the world in return for our defiance of it.

When we are initiated into the realm of Christ, we discover the new world for which Christ is born to reign over it from His throne forever. This new world is termed "The Kingdom of God." It is the world of the justified humanity which is subject to God; the world of saints and the spirits of angels; the world of the living Church and the mystical Body; the world of eternal light.

So, to everyone who believes in Christ and is baptized in His name, Christ is not revealed as born far away from him or her, in Bethlehem, nor is He revealed as merely born in one's heart. If we envisage it, this would turn the substance of true revelation into a merely historical one, which is only an image of the truth. The true mystical revelation of Christ's birth in relation to us only occurs precisely when we are born to God in Christ. So, through faith and the mystical, spiritual baptism in Christ, we receive the mystery of divine birth from God. Scripture expresses it this way:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13).

Therefore, we are called to see Christ's birth in our own birth from God, a birth actualized by divine power which does not depend on any power on our part, but on the power of faith working through love. It is not affected by any sin inherited through the flesh but transcends every sin by washing it with the blood of Christ which is extraordinary in its mercy, kindness, and compassion for our weakness.

For this reason, everyone who lives out his or her new birth in Christ lives and sees the heavenly Bethlehem as the angels perceive. Henceforth, he will never stop praising God's glory in the highest day and night, nor will he ever cease to delve deep into the peace of Christ on earth, nor to discern God's joy amidst the tribulations of this age.

Brethren, we are bonded together on this occasion by the fact that one of the most amazing mysteries of Christ has been conveyed to us... The Spirit of Christ has clothed us with the garbs of love and lavished the grace of humility upon our poverty, weakness, and humiliation. He then fused our hearts together into one, that we may rejoice together, grieve together, fall ill together, and give thanks together. We, therefore, step forward to petition God to sanctify our unity, love, misery, joy, grief, illness, and thanksgiving, and turn them into a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to Him, for the sake of the love and honor due to His blessed and great name.

