



Grand Prelate's Monthly Message

DECEMBER 2023

As we celebrate the holiday season, we should pause to reflect on what Christmas is all about. It all comes down to one simple fact: At Bethlehem, a baby was born who was God in human flesh. This is the central truth of the Christian faith. That God became man. Everything else that we believe derives from that. And we celebrate that birth during the season we call Christmas.

In 2010 I had the privilege of being sent to Israel as one of the ministers chosen for the Holy Land Pilgrimage. As part of that trip, we visited the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, located on the spot where many believe that Jesus was born.

To enter the church, you must stoop low to get through the doorway. The entrance was lowered many centuries ago to keep people from entering on horseback, and to prevent bringing livestock inside. The church is beautiful. But the place where Jesus was born lies beneath the church. The manger is what remains of a cave that was once used to house animals during the time of Jesus' birth.

You must step down into this cave to find the spot where, it is believed, that Mary gave birth to Jesus. You must kneel in order to reach in and touch the bedrock of this sacred spot; perhaps that is fitting. A few feet away is the spot where, it is said, that the feeding trough stood, carved out of the rock face. This is the place where the baby Jesus was laid. It is where the shepherds came to worship him. It is a holy place.

Bethlehem is still the focus of our world's longings, for we believe that the baby born there is nothing less than the power of love incarnate. This baby that we celebrate would live a sinless life. He would sacrifice his own life to pay our debt, becoming the perfect lamb of God who takes away our sin and provides for us an eternal relationship with God.

That is why we dare to defy all that is wrong in this world as we praise the birth of the Christ Child. For this child is the Son of God. He is our Savior and Lord.

As we sing in the song 'O Little Town of Bethlehem': "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

Behold the glory of the only begotten Son, full of grace and truth. We do not just behold him; we are to meet Him, worship Him, and claim Him in the name of love.

Bethlehem means 'House of Bread' and that is a very fitting name for the place of our Savior's birth. It was there that God choose to send His son to be born. That baby was placed in a feeding trough, and from there, we were nourished and fed. And our joy at the birth of Christ will last forever.

Always and All Ways in Christ
Rick Saunders
Grand Prelate