

## Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle, Melbourne



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### PASTORAL LETTER

#### SEASON OF ANNUNCIATION 2020

Rev. Fathers, Dear sisters, brothers, and children in Christ,

Our liturgical year begins with the season of Annunciation, which commemorates the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus. Traditionally Saint Thomas Christians observe twenty-five days of lent in preparation for the holy Nativity. With reinvigorated faith, love and hope, let us devoutly observe these days in preparation for Christmas.

The season of Annunciation consists of four weeks. I invite you to prepare for the holy Nativity, living in the spirit of the insights arising from the Word of God of the Sundays of the season of Nativity.

The gospel of the first Sunday of the season of Nativity is the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist (Lk 1:5-25). The angel said: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son." For the childless couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth, this was wonderful good news of God's love. May we too receive in our life always the good news of God's love!

The gospel of the second Sunday is the annunciation of the birth of Jesus (Lk 1:26-56). The angel said: "Do not be afraid, Mary, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus." After the example of the Blessed Mother, let us strive to live, in every circumstance of life, with the disposition: 'here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'

The gospel of the third Sunday is about the birth of John (Lk 1:57-66). "The hand of the Lord was with him. He was to go before the Lord to prepare his ways. He became strong in spirit." Let us pray that likewise the hand of the Lord be always with us and we be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to prepare the way for Jesus in various circumstance of our life.

The gospel of the fourth Sunday presents the divine intervention in the birth of Jesus (Mt 1:18-24). Having discerned the divine will, the just man, Saint Joseph did as the angel of the Lord instructed him and became the foster father of Jesus. When we are ready to discern, even beyond human understanding, divine interventions in our life, and cooperate with them, we will be blessed in our family to experience the divine love and the gift of peace.

I would like to affectionately exhort you to prepare well spiritually for the feast of Nativity, living the season of Annunciation, challenged by the word of God. I wish that this Christmas be the good news of great joy to us.

Pope Francis begins his last year's Christmas message quoting the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light"(Is 9:1). Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, in the liturgy of the mother Church. His name, Jesus means: "God saves". God the Father, the eternal and infinite love, has sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world but to save it (cf. Jn 3:17). The Father, out of his immense mercy, has given him as the saviour of the whole world. Our saviour is born in the cold and darkness of the night, to become light for us who walk in darkness. Jesus, born of Mary, is the Word of God. This Word guided Abraham's steps towards the Promised Land. The Word led the Israelites on their journey to freedom. The incarnate tiny babe, Jesus is the light of the world, brighter than the sun. That is why the prophet Isaiah announced: "The people who walked in the darkness have seen a great light". Christ the light can wipe out the darkness from human hearts. The incarnate child is capable of removing the darkness from our relationships, whether be it in the human, environmental and family sphere, and bring in the warmth of the light of love.

During the 2019 Christmas celebrations no one might have ever dreamed that in 2020 the humanity will be groping its way in the thick darkness of corona virus. Let us hope and pray that Christ, the light of the world, leads us out of this darkness.

The COVID-19 lockdown can be compared to the Ark of Noah of the Book of Genesis, chapters 6-9. The ark of Noah is the first lockdown in human history against a pandemic (deluge).

The Book of Genesis mentions that the background of deluge is the disharmony caused by man in his relationship with God, nature and humanity. After the creation of man the Lord was very happy (Gen 1:31), but thereafter Yahweh regretted having created man on the earth and his heart grieved (Gen 6:6). The reason is also explained. "The wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts and their hearts was only evil" (Gen 6:5). Yet, the Lord, who is love itself, makes a plan to save humanity and nature. For the survival of humanity, God asked Noah to build the ark. God's plan for the Ark has three very important, positive messages for us.

Firstly, the building of the ark was God's plan and not man's – it was theocentric, not egocentric. It was the will of God and not Noah's ego-drive. The ark was for regaining the lost harmony between man and God, by respecting the primacy of God.

Secondly, the ark was eco-friendly and protective of the creation. God protects humanity, not by ignoring the nature and all its creatures. Survival of humanity is possible only when there is protection to nature and its creatures. The story of the ark of Noah reminds us of a timely and relevant message of the integral survival of the nature and environment. The ark protected not only man but also one couple each of every species of creation. Ark was to protect the whole creation and its harmony. It emphasizes the importance of the need of the warm relationship existing between man and nature.

Thirdly, Ark was family oriented plan for the survival of humanity. Not only Noah but also all his children and their family were protected in the ark. The ark was not for the ego-centred pleasure ride of Noah, but for the survival of the whole family in happiness. The same has to happen in our own time also. The fundamental lessons of selfless love and

fraternity, which we learn at home from parents, has to train us for the promotion of warm human relationships in the society.

Today, COVID-19 lockdown gives us valuable lessons as those of the ark of Noah. If we lead a God-centred, environment-friendly and family oriented life, God will be glorified and people on earth will be blessed with peace. Then the dove of peace will bring into our life the olive leaf, the symbol of prosperity. Rainbow, the symbol of hope will appear on the horizon of our life.

The survival story of Noah's family and that of the nature and all the creatures during the deluge, gives us a positive message regarding our own survival during the Pandemic. Let us ask ourselves during this season of Annunciation: Is the Lord who created me sorry about it? Is wickedness growing in me? Are the inclinations of my thoughts and heart becoming evil? During the season of Annunciation the Lord is inviting us for an in depth examination of conscience.

Pope Francis reminds us that Christmas is the never ceasing heroic story of God's love. The goal of human life is to know God, love him and share that love with others. In order to be able to experience the love of the Father, revealed to us in the holy Nativity of Jesus Christ and continuously given to us through the Holy Spirit, we have to be ready to acknowledge ours sinfulness, humbly confess it and beg for God's forgiveness. Let us strive for it during the season of Annunciation.

Wishing you the blessings of the forthcoming season of Annunciation and that of Holy Nativity,

Your Bishop in Jesus Christ,  
+Bosco Puthur  
20 November 2020  
Feast of Christ the King.

\* This Pastoral Letter is to be read in our churches on 29 November (Sunday) 2020.