

### Christmas & New Year 2016 Message

From the Bible account, the birth of our Jesus Christ was foretold to the Virgin Mary – a young virgin woman possibly in her teens, by the angel Gabriel, who was sent by God. To the Virgin Mary, angel Gabriel's visit could be an embarrassment because that could possibly be her first experience of an angel's visit. Thus at the angel's appearance, Mary was naturally afraid. Although, Mary, was already in the process of being pledged to be married to a man called Joseph, the angel created further fear in Mary by announcing to her that she would be pregnant even when she had not had physical contact or formal relationship with Joseph. For such a virgin woman to be pregnant without being properly given in marriage to a man was not only scandalous, outrageously disgraceful and baffling according to the Jewish religious culture but a great sin with a capital punishment which could be by stoning of the woman to death. However, Virgin Mary knowing that this matter was God's plan and desire, she surrendered totally and submitted herself absolutely; she accepted the message of God through angel Gabriel. When she later visited her cousin Elizabeth and received the affirmation of angel Gabriel's message, Mary sang the "Magnificat" (Luke 1:46-56).

The choice by God of the Virgin Mary to be the mother of our Savior Jesus Christ is intriguing and worth our attention at this Christmas. God could not have located and chosen the Virgin Mary for nothing; she possessed some outstanding and distinctive character and attributes that fit into God's plan and that was why she was the divine choice:

- That she was one of the virgins at that time suggests that she was one of those in the community with high morals and discipline, integrity and self-control.
- She was of a humble background or origin, and a woman of simplicity and humility.
- She would submit totally to God and His will even if she had to bear and carry the shame and become unpopular in the society; she was submissive entirely and absolutely to divine authority.
- She was unconditionally obedient to the divine authority and will and only after her obedience and submission did she seek understanding of the mystery.
- The Virgin Mary was a woman of courage because she trusted God for the fulfillment of God's word and His promises and therefore she would not be worried what the world, culture, tradition and so forth would say or do.

- She must have realized herself as a discovery by God to become a channel and a means of bringing about God's fulfillment and plan to the human race of the long awaited Messiah.
- At the conviction and confirmation of being the mother of the Messiah she was full of praise and her "Magnificat" (Luke 1:46-56) says it all.
- Mary's visit to her cousin, Elizabeth, helped a lot in the constriction and putting the bits and pieces together, and making sense of the theological placements of the birth, life and ministry of John the Baptist with that of Jesus Christ. The Virgin Mary was an evangelist in context.

As we celebrate Christmas this time around, we need the Savior in our broken world; we need the Messiah to save us from the terrorists and all the so called radicalized Islamists and others who use religion as a cover up for evil deeds; we need the Lord Jesus Christ in our individual life to transform us from our sinfulness; we need the Lord to help us amend our estranged relationship and repair the dysfunctional dynamics in our family; we need the divine visit and revelation to strengthen us and give us courage to surrender and be submissive to the plans and will of God no matter what; we need Jesus in our home and in our nation and world to give us peace and joy that do not carry any sorrow or pain along.

If God used the Virgin Mary to bring about the birth and first coming of Jesus, and thereby fulfilling the prophecy of Prophet Isaiah "...unto us, a child is born, unto us a child is given..." (Isaiah 9: 2, 6-7), can we be trusted with the gospel to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified, who resurrected from the dead and who will surely come again to judge the world? His first coming was to save the world and confirm the love of God, (John 3:16); His second coming is to judge the world, (Acts 1:10-11, Rev. 22:10-17).

Consequently, it is good we ponder on the following questions; is God likely to find us worthy to receive the announcement of the angel? Do we have any such character and attributes like the Virgin Mary to be worth visiting? How many times do we give and show appreciation to God for the special blessings and favor and grace we receive from God? Is the spirit of praise and singing the "Magnificat" in us? Who would God find in our family, church or congregation, archdeaconry and MDT like the Virgin Mary that would be submissive, humble, trustworthy, ready to bear any shame or become unpopular only for God's will to be done and God's plan to be fulfilled?

Finally, as we look forward to a new year 2016, we thank you all for your prayers for us and for your cooperation in building our diocese. We declare the coming year, “**A Year of Divine Encounter**” (Acts 9:1-19). This will be our theme throughout the diocese and in all our churches for 2016. As a diocese, let us seek the face of God in all things and turn our eyes from worthless things or from vanity. Our scripture text to guide us and build our spirituality is Psalm 119: 37, “*Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken Thou me in Thy way.*”

Prayer: *Yea, Lord we salute and welcome You, for unto us a Child is born and unto us a Son is given. Lord Jesus, to You be all the glory, Word of God the Creator, who came to us as Emmanuel, come to us and heal our broken world, come to redeem us from perishing and eternal condemnation, come to heal us from sicknesses and distresses of life, come to give us the peace and joy of life, come Jesus, come and make us experience and encounter You.*

We wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. The peace, mercy and joy of the Lord be multiplied unto you and all MDT households. Amen!

Your Bishop and friend,

*+ Amos MDT*

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