

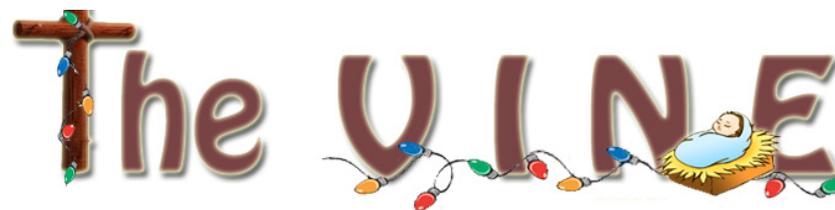
Festal Nativity Letter of H.H. Pope Shenouda III from 2000

Through the birth of Christ the world began a new age that is completely different from all the ages preceding it. This Birth became a separator between two distinguished ages that are (B.C.) before Christ and A.D. (Anno Domini) the year of the Lord.

Through the birth of Christ, salvation was born and we received the grace of sonship and now we can call God Our Father Who art in heaven. Hence the divine image returned to us that we had lost through sin and we receive it through the grace of baptism. The Feast of the Nativity is the beginning of all feasts in the New Testament. It was this feast of which the angel cried out saying, "I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

Celebrating the Feast of the Nativity is not a celebration of the end of our fast nor is it merely the exchange of greetings and it is not a worldly joy that is expressed by certain aspects or appearances, but the true joy is to receive the effectiveness of the Nativity in our practical life. The blessing of a new Christmas comes to us by hearing the words of the Holy Bible, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2) Yes, we are not of this world to be conformed to it! Here is what the Lord says to us, "You are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world." (John 15:19) Therefore, do not conform to this world, but may you have your own specific appearance that distinguishes you. As it was said by Saint John the Beloved, "In this the children of God are manifest." (1 John 3:10) Therefore, whoever sees you would say, 'Truly they are God's children. They have His image as God created them according to His image and likeness.' (Genesis 1:26, 27)

In celebrating the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, we remember that God has restored to us the divine image. So be firm in it, because you are the children of God and you must be according to His likeness.



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St. Athanasius

On The Incarnation

For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us. He saw the reasonable race, the race of men that, like Himself, expressed the Father's Mind, wasting out of existence, and death reigning over all in corruption. He saw that corruption held us all the closer, because it was the penalty for the Transgression; He saw, too, how unthinkable it would be for the law to be repealed before it was fulfilled. He saw how unseemly it was that the very things of which He Himself was the Artificer should be disappearing. He saw how the surpassing wickedness of men was mounting up against them; He saw also their universal liability to death. All this He saw and, pitying our race, moved with compassion for our limitation, unable to endure that that death should have the mastery,



Book Review

On The Unity of Christ
St. Cyril of Alexandria
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rather than that His creatures should perish and the work of His Father for us men come to nought, He took to Himself a body, a human body even as our own. Nor did He will merely to become embodied or merely to appear; had that been so, He could have revealed His divine majesty in some other and better way. No, He took *our* body, and not only so, but He took it directly from a spotless, stainless virgin, without the agency of human father—a pure body, untainted by intercourse with man. He, the Mighty One, the Artificer of all, Himself prepared this body in the virgin as a temple for Himself, and took it for His very own, as the instrument through which He was known and in which He dwelt. Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished because, having fulfilled in His body that for which it was appointed, it was thereafter voided of its power for men. This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned back to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.



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On the Unity of Christ was written by St. Cyril of Alexandria. Pope Cyril, the 24th Pope of Alexandria, defended the true faith in the face of the heretical doctrines of Nestorius during the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. The book is part of the Popular Patristics Series, a series of writings by the early Fathers that includes books such as *On the Incarnation* by St. Athanasius, *On the Dormition of Mary*, and *On the Holy Spirit* by St. Basil the Great. Through his book *On the Unity of Christ*, Pope Cyril discredits the doctrines of Nestorius and beautifully defends and preserves the true Christological faith.

The entire book is a conversation that St. Cyril is having with another person about the Nestorian heresy. Pope Cyril uses his great wisdom to effectively paint the true Christological faith, feeding off the Bible to portray the true nature of Christ. He explains that Divine Word did not unite with Christ after his birth from the Virgin, but the Word emptied Himself in all His glory and became Man, being born from the Virgin. Throughout the conversation in the book, Pope Cyril beautifully portrays the true understanding of Christ and simultaneously discredits the Nestorian doctrine, all the while combining a depth of spiritual understanding with sensible and logical reasoning. Although Pope Cyril's explanations and arguments are logically grounded and do very much appeal to reason, his writing is intellectually demanding and thus should not be read passively or without a pencil.

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