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His Holiness Pope Tawadros II
Pope of Alexandria and
Patriarch of the See of St. Mark
The Papal Center



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The Papal Encyclical for the Glorious Feast of Nativity 2017

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God Amen.

May His grace and blessings be bestowed upon us, from now and forever, Amen.

May you remain healthy this year of 2017 and every year, and during the Glorious feast of the Nativity on January 7th, according to the eastern calendar, which is Kiahk 29th, according to the Coptic calendar.

In fact, as we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, we continue to remember our sons and daughters the martyrs who recently offered their lives in the events of St. Peter's Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ has granted them to celebrate this feast and this year with Him in heaven. We remember them with all goodness. We pray for our wounded and injured ones that Christ may complete their healing and restore their health so that they may join us soon.

In the feast of the Nativity, there are many contemplations. God created man and crowned him over the kingdom of the world, represented by Adam and Eve. Man lived on earth and the number of human beings multiplied, and man lived by the virtues which appeared and flourished. Virtues of cooperation, love and loyalty have appeared; but also some human weaknesses have surfaced. Throughout human existence on earth, and the extension of sin penetration in our life, and with the images of sin, weaknesses, conflicts and violence, man has forgotten one of the most important virtues in life which is the virtue of looking up to heaven. It is amazing that all people can see the sky everywhere and there is no human being that has not seen the sky, but what is more amazing are the differing reactions from one person to another. Some do not care for heaven, some find refuge in it, and others take shelter there. There are many people who ignore heaven and others that gaze up to heaven constantly.

In the story of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, we find this virtue manifested in the lives of many people. In the life of our mother the Virgin St. Mary, when she was offered in the temple, she was constantly looking up to heaven; she lived a life of praises and prayers. When the angel appeared to her with the good news, she concluded her dialogue with him declaring: "I am the maid servant of the Lord. Let it be according to your word." (Luke 1: 38). This virtue appears in her obedience, which was intertwined with humility. Also the simple shepherds, who were watching over their flocks, would gaze up to heaven in the midst of the night. They saw the angel who carried the great glad tidings to them and to all people. They went on their way to see the Baby who was wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger. Also the magi, whose job was to observe the sky, were constantly watching the stars, trying to identify the superior star which they knew according to their books and teachings.

When they saw this star, they realized that the Lord of truth had come to the world. They looked up to heaven, to this star. They travelled a long journey from the far east country to Bethlehem. The star guided them, stayed with them and revealed to them the location of the newborn King of the Jews. The same with the elder Simeon, who was more than 300 years old. Our mother the Virgin St. Mary and St. Joseph came to do for Jesus according to the custom of the law. Simeon carried baby Jesus in his arms. He was one of those who translated the Old Testament of the Holy Bible from Hebrew to Greek. He said this famous verse: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation." (Luke 2: 30). There is also another example, Anna the prophetess. She was a widow, and had lived with her husband for seven years, and was a widow of about eighty-four years. She stayed in the temple praying and praising night and day while her eyes were fixed on heaven.

These are samples and examples from the story of the Nativity. They all gazed up to heaven. Perhaps there is a question now: What is the importance of looking up to heaven? There is no doubt that looking up to heaven has a great benefit in the life of man.

- 1) The person who looks up to heaven looks up to the Almighty Creator, Who created the universe and all its creatures. He looks up to his source, which is heaven. He looks up also to his destination, which is also heaven.
- 2) He who gazes up to heaven; he gazes up to the light. I do not mean the materialistic light such as the sun or stars. He looks up to the inner or spiritual light, that is the light of the heart. When man has an illuminated heart, and lives in the light, he can live successfully every day.
- 3) Looking up to heaven is looking up to a continuous life of peace. It is written: "Blessed be the peace makers as they are called the sons of God". Whoever looks up to heaven, grasps peace from the King of peace. This peace dwells in his heart. If man did this, he would be gifted this character. He would become a peacemaker everywhere. The one who looks constantly down to earth pursues violence, war, conflicts, and terrors.
- 4) Also, whoever looks up to heaven, looks up to the continuous joy. Heavenly joy is glorious, continuous, and everlasting. It is not associated with bitterness. Earthly joy appears exhilarating, but is brief and temporary. The earthly joy is often associated with bitterness. That is why it is easily forgotten. Whoever receives his joy from heaven and looks up to heaven continuously, lives in such joy.
- 5) Perhaps one of the most important benefits a man gains when he looks up to heaven is an attachment to the saints. Heaven is the abode of the saints, the righteous, and the blameless, who lived in holiness. We are yearning for those who have lived in holiness, and remember all the saints in heaven who intercede on our behalf. This intercession stimulates and motivates us to increase our longing and yearning for heaven.

Looking up to heaven is a live virtue that can constantly change our lives. One of the beautiful things as we start the new year of 2017 is the shape of the number 7 in Arabic, which appears like open arms toward heaven, as if one is raising his arms towards heaven, seeking it. If heaven is present in man's life, he will become successful. We always pray daily several times and say: "Let it be on earth as it is in heaven."

I congratulate you all. I congratulate all the fathers the metropolitans, the bishops, the priests, the deacons, and all the clergy, all the congregations, church boards, and committees. I congratulate all servants. I congratulate all youth and all families everywhere in our churches who celebrate this feast in this time. I congratulate all children and young people. I pray that God grants us grace and sustenance this year. I convey to you greetings and love from the land of Egypt, the land of St. Mark the Apostle and Evangelist, who preached the faith of Christ to all of our country.

May you remain healthy this year and every year. I wish you all blessings from the Baby of the manger, to grant you joy, peace, and hope always.

And all glory and honor be to God from now and forever. Amen.

Panadras II

