



The Presiding Bishop's Christmas Message Advent 2022

To: All Clergy and Laity of the Anglican Province of America and
our Communion Partners

AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH...

A happy Christmas to you all! Christ-Mass is not only a wonderful holiday, a time for family and friends, and a joyful occasion for gift-giving – certainly it is all of these things. More imperatively, it is a theological event, a revelation of God, a life-altering reality we again and again re-live through the Church's liturgy. The greatest challenge to the twenty-first century Church is not the reformation polemics of the sixteenth century or the rationalism of the eighteenth century, but the theological controversies of the fourth century. *Christology* will be the focus of the Church in the next generation. The ancient heresies that deny the Divinity of Our Lord are again in vogue and are finding a fresh expression in the purportedly novel methods of what Father Richard John Neuhaus wittily called 'the sideline churches.' 73% of persons who profess evangelical Christianity now believe Jesus Christ is a created being.

Whether we consciously recognise it or not, the struggle for Christians in our contemporary age is to recover and promote the old paths, the Old Time Religion. 'Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls' (Jeremiah 6.16). Orthodox Christians are today challenged firmly to uphold and boldly to proclaim in ancient and yet ever revitalised ways the truth that Jesus Christ, the Babe in Bethlehem's manger, is not merely a good person, a prophet, or a noble teacher, but the true God made Man. The Feast of Our Lord's Nativity recapitulates for us each year the central doctrinal truth and mystery of the Christian Faith, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Word made Flesh. Who is born in Bethlehem on Christmas Day? The Baby in the manger is God. '*God of God, Light of Light, Lo! He abhors not the Virgin's womb: Very God, Begotten, not created; O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord*' (Hymnal 1940, Hymn 12).

The Son of God, the pre-existent Logos, Who became incarnate in the flesh as Jesus Christ, is *not* a creature, *not* a being created by God the Father before all other created things or beings. The term *homoousios*, 'of one substance' with the Father, is used by the Church to affirm that Our Lord is truly God. If Jesus Christ is not God, is not of one essence or substance with the Father, and is not a true divine Person sharing the divine life and communion of the Father by nature, then God Himself did not assume human nature in the Incarnation, and thus man has not been redeemed or saved. The Holy Fathers of the Church teach that 'only that which is assumed can be redeemed.' Our Saviour brought about atonement and the salvation of mankind, for He is God, Who assumes all that pertains to human nature, body, mind and soul. Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Godhead and 'One of the Holy Trinity.' Christmas is the Feast of the revealed dogma of the Trinitarian nature and communion of God, Three Persons in One Essence, one and undivided. The Father is unbegotten, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father alone, and the Holy Ghost eternally proceeds from the Father, and is sent through the Son and rests in the Son. On Christmas, we contemplate the Lord Jesus in His identity and mission: the Word of God, the Logos, Who became Man in the Incarnation is the Most High God.

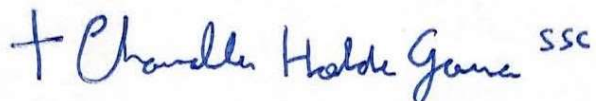
The New Testament describes Our Lord as *monogenes* in Greek, 'only-begotten.' This term designates the mysterious and eternal relationship of the Son to the Father within the communion of the Trinity. The Son has

for all eternity come out from the Father and derives His eternal existence, His generation, from the Father, the sole Origin, Source and Fountain of the Trinitarian life. The words of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed purposely utilise the language of the New Testament regarding the Person of Our Lord and declare that the Lord Jesus Christ is 'one Lord, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made...' From all eternity, the Son derives His eternal being, glory and majesty from the Father's essence. He is eternally born of the Father, co-equal, co-eternal. Begotten means 'from God forever,' *eternal generation* from the Father, not a created status.

And what for us is the result of this begetting, the Son eternally begotten of the Father and now begotten in time and in human flesh by the Holy Ghost of the Blessed Virgin? Our own new birth, our begetting by God, our adoption as the children of God by grace. We become by grace what the only-begotten Son is by nature. From Christ's timeless birth from His Father and His earthly birth of Mary, we are born again in Holy Baptism by Water and the Holy Ghost (Saint John 3.5) unto eternal life. 'In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him' (I Saint John 4.9) 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him' (I Saint John 5.1).

'Mild he lays his glory by, Born that man no more may die, Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth' (Hymnal 1940, Hymn 27).

Please be assured of my love and prayers for each and every one of you and your families. A joyous and happy Christmas to you all - God bless you!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads '+ Chandler Holder Jones SSC'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

The Most Reverend Chandler Holder Jones, SSC
Presiding Bishop, Anglican Province of America