



# The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island

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## **Bishop Lawrence C. Provenzano's Christmas Message 2021**

As we approach the celebration of Christmas, I am very mindful of the fact that the gospel passages, particularly from St. Luke 's and St. Matthew's Gospels, they give us the birth narrative and the story of the birth of Jesus and the events surrounding us. They tell us the story of many miracles that take place, whether it's the star in the sky that the three wise men follow, whether it's the virgin birth itself, whether it is the movement of the shepherds in the field, the miraculous showing of angels singing glory to God in the highest—we are inundated with the stories of miracles in the Christmas narrative.

I would like to suggest, brothers and sisters, that in this Christmas-tide, we pay attention to yet another miracle to which we are asked to become a part. And that is the miracle of the Incarnation that happens in your heart and in my heart, a birthing of Jesus in the midst of our very selves, a new birth in the midst of God's people as we celebrate the Feast of the Incarnation, commonly called Christmas.

This past week, I was visiting with one of our priests who shared with me a hypothesis about the situation we find ourselves in in society today. And his hypothesis moved in two directions: that one of the things that was going on in the midst of society is that we have lost the ability to be forgiving, that we want to extract from others who have wronged us—those who have done something wrong, those who have somehow stepped outside of the normal bonds of our common humanity, that they somehow pay a price, that they pay for their wrongs before we will forgive them. We want to extract something from them.

The other was the lack of humility that exists in our society. We live in a time in which everyone wants to be first. Everyone wants to be a winner. Everyone wants to dominate. And that loss of humanity, the humility that is at play there, has affected us in our human interactions.

The church proclaims the birth of Christ at Christmas, the church proclaims a message of love and joy and hope, but a miracle must take place now. And that is that Jesus must be reborn in each of us, in our hearts, in our very being, in the way we see world around us, recognizing the need, both for forgiveness and humility in the midst of a sinful and broken world.

You and I are being asked, sisters and brothers, to be a Christmas gift to the world. We are being asked to be the creche, the manger in which Jesus is born again and again and again, in all of our human interactions, whether it's in the church or at school or at work; for us to understand, appreciate, and encapsulate in our being a sense of forgiveness and a humility that allows us to accept what is around us. Not having to dominate, not having to win, not having to be first, but to be a sister or brother to another human being.

And so my friends as we come to the celebration of the Incarnation, as we come to celebrate Christmas with family and loved ones in our church, communities, in our neighborhoods and all the places we find ourselves, I ask you to enter into a new miracle and allow the birth of Jesus to take hold in your heart, to extend to those around you both forgiveness, and a sense of holy humility that allows us to proclaim the joy and hope and love of Jesus Christ in the midst of the world in which we live. Sisters and brothers, have a blessed Christmas season and a holy and joyful start to the new year.