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PEACE ON EARTH

BY H.G. BISHOP YOUSSEF

While we celebrate this New Year and the Glorious Feast of the Nativity, I would like each one of us to take measure of the amount of Peace that exists in our lives; the quiet times in which we allow our minds to reflect upon the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and recapture and live the Peace intended for us through this miraculous, divine event in today's world threatened with wars and rumors of impending wars. Is your life surrounded by the Peace of our Lord? Or does work entanglement, love of social life, and competitiveness override your Peace; leaving little or no room at all for it; making the business of "getting ahead" precede Christ's Peace?

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was not born into peaceful times. Nor did His Holy Birth precipitate peaceful times upon the land. Born during a time for mandatory census, the jealousy of a king that precipitated indiscriminate killing of male infants, and a time of ceaseless oppression for the poor; our Lord's birth did not manifest the Peace the Heavenly Host had proclaimed... *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men?"* (Luke 2:14). "Peace on earth" promised Christ's Peace to those who were willing to love and obey God. The Peace brought to this earth was three dimensional: 1) peace between God and man, 2) peace between man and his brother, and 3) peace between man and himself; primarily, peace wrought through reconciling humanity with God the Father and people to each other through belief in and worship of One God. While a belief in One God is of absolute necessity, it must be combined with a true worship and communion with One God. A true worship, not a "get to Divine Liturgy race before the Holy Bible is read, maybe I can fit in the Vespers after work, or I will not be able to stay for the Midnight Praises because I have plans early tomorrow", type of worship. This is the Feast of beginnings, a time to commit to that true worship. Many early Christian beliefs, early church doctrines, and early Church congregations, in particular, focused on the essence of One-God worship through an obedient love for the Lord Jesus Christ and abiding in peace. Why peace? Peace on earth was brought down to man so that man would know that he is the son of One God. If all men knew they were the sons of One God then there would be peace as the Prince of Peace came to seek and save the lost. The Lord Jesus Christ's mission was to establish peace. Lactantius (c. 304-313) teaches us, *"If only God were worshipped, there would not be dissensions and wars. For men would know that they are the sons of One God...Why would the just and upright Godly man carry on war and mix himself with the passions of others when his mind is engaged in perpetual peace with men? Further, would he be delighted with foreign merchandise or with human blood—he who does not know how to seek gain? For the Christian is satisfied with his standard of living. He considers it unlawful not only to commit slaughter himself, but also to be present with those who do it."* Peace had come down to earth in the form of an infant; the form of newness, in the form of creation, in the beating of a pure heart. A Peace one could lift one's eyes up to and see it declared from the Heavens. Indeed, one could feel that Peace in the midst of a humble birth, and in that humble birth anticipate eternity. This Peace was of a pure nature, everlasting, binding and comforting. The peacefulness of love from God the Father, in the form of an Infant Child was for then, now and forever.

Cyprian (c. 250) said, *"The One peaceful and trustworthy tranquility, the One solid, firm, and constant security is this: for a man to withdraw from this whirlpool of a distracting world and to life his eyes from earth to Heaven, anchored on the ground of the harbor of salvation...He who is actually greater than the world can crave nothing or desire nothing from the world. How stable, how free from all shocks is that safeguard. How Heavenly...to be loosed from the snares of this entangling world and to be purged from earthly dregs and be fitted for the light of eternal immortality."* At the presentation of the infant Lord Jesus in the temple, Simon the prophet, after seeing Him, knew with confidence that he could then **depart in peace...** *"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel"* (Luke 2:29-32). May the Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ dwell within us all during this celebration of His glorious birth.

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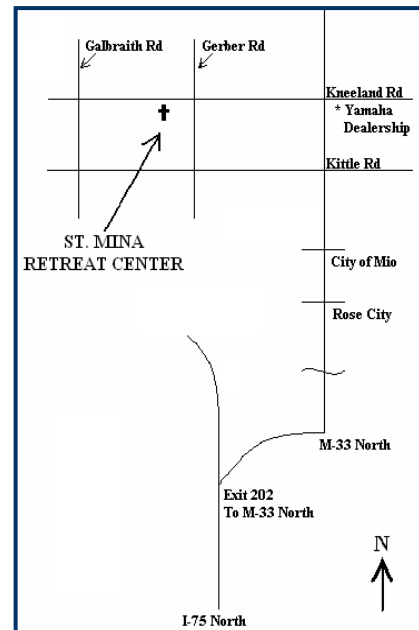
UPCOMING RETREATS AT ST. MINA'S – 2012

December 22-23 **Deacon's Retreat**

WHAT'S NEW AT ST. MINA'S RETREAT CENTER...

ST. MARK'S CHRISTIAN ACADEMY~4TH & 5TH GRADERS ~OCTOBER 2012

The main focus of the retreat was to provide landscape beautification for St. Mina's through community service and outdoor education. With the help of donations and fundraisers at school and church, students were able to raise the money to purchase and plant three perennial flower beds on the north and east sides of the new building. In addition to landscaping, students were able to enjoy the beauty of being up north including nature walks, golf cart rides, paddle boats, and building their own fires. While studying human body systems, each student also dissected a sheep eye. New to our visit this year was our first talent show where each child or group of children displayed special talents! Abouna Mina led a prayer service on Wednesday morning before we returned back to school.



OTHER NEWS... St. Mina's Retreat Center now has a new building recently opened to receive around 70 participants. This new facility is equipped with a large gathering area and full kitchen facilities to support groups coming for a retreat. We invite to come and enjoy the peaceful and blessed surrounding.

If you know anyone who is not currently receiving this newsletter and would like to receive it, please send their information to info@stminaretreatcenter.org