

CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR MESSAGE – MUCG 2018

Opening Remarks

Ladies and gentlemen, our gathering here tonight is an indication that soon the year 2018 will come to an end and we soon shall enter the year 2019. The year 2018 has been another year of challenges for us as institution of higher learning – but I am optimistic of a brighter future. My dear brothers and sisters, for all the mercies, the grace, the protection and the provisions that the Lord has bestowed on us, I feel compelled to express gratitude to God.

For us as Christians, we herald the celebration of the birth of Jesus with the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols is a service of Christian Worship celebrating the birth of Jesus that is traditionally followed at Christmas. The story of the fall of humanity, the promise of the Messiah and the birth of Jesus is told in nine short Bible readings from Genesis, the prophetic books and the Gospels. These are interspersed with the singing of Christmas carols, hymns and choir music.

I warmly welcome you all to this year's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols.

Christmas/New Year Message/Concluding Remarks

I thank God for the opportunity granted me to share with you one or two lessons drawn from a very familiar Bible text for the season. The text which is found in Isaiah 7:14, and also quoted in Matthew 1:23 reads: **“The virgin will be with a child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel, which means God with us”**. I wish to leave the subject of interpretation to the theologians and speak as a layman, putting my message together under two main headings, which are:

(1) a virgin shall conceive, and

(2) Immanuel, God with us.

A virgin shall conceive: I do not know what came into your mind as I read to you this statement, but I can say with all certainty that none of us here will dispute the fact that these words of the prophet Isaiah propose a biological impossibility, at least among humans.

In some organisms, a phenomenon known as parthenogenesis can occur. Parthenogenesis, involves the development of an organism from an unfertilized gamete, or sex cell. It is common in the animal kingdom up through the Class Insecta, but it occurs much more rarely thereafter. The mechanisms involved in the process are not yet well understood. A few kinds of amphibians, reptiles, and birds can reproduce parthenogenetically but the outcome are always sterile, and mammal embryos derived experimentally in this manner die within a period of days. Parthenogenesis also occurs, less commonly, among the lower plants. Among plants, the biological reproduction of fruit without fertilization is called parthenocarpy. Such fruit is seedless.

My dear brothers and sisters what it means is that naturally in the human species, a female cannot have a child without the fusion of male and female gametes. Probably, it was for this reason that at creation God created male and female for the purpose of propagation of the human species. Perhaps, the Virgin Mary was right therefore when she asked the angel who informed her about the prospect of having a baby without ‘knowing a man’, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” Naturally, what we all tend to do as humans is that we focus much on our human limitations as bases for judging the possibility or otherwise of any task we are confronted with.

We need to listen to the inner self. When God calls, we need to recognize His voice and submit to His will.

Interestingly, Mary was not the first person who reacted in this manner to an invitation to perform a task for God. When Moses was sent to go and deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt, he asked “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” When Gideon was asked to lead Israel in a liberation war against the Midianites he asked, “How can I save Israel...?” When Zechariah the priest was promised a son in his old age he asked, “How can I be sure of this?” These are but a few examples in the Good Book.

The good news for all believers, however, is that on the part of God, the impossibility of any proposal, such as the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus rests solely with the human mind, and not with God. The angel of God emphasised this point in his message to Mary “...nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37)”.

If all things are possible with God, then it means that we are either failing or having difficulties in many spheres of life because we are doing it without God – we fail to submit ourselves to the will of God. It may be that we are experiencing several unfulfilled dreams; marriages are breaking apart; crime rate is increasing; moral standards are falling; political and civil conflicts are on the increase largely because we are doing it without God. You might be going through some difficulty as I speak with you right now. This could be a difficulty in giving up a bad habit; difficulty in relationships; marriage breaking apart; academic difficulty, or whatever. My personal conviction is that we can all live a divinely empowered life, a life that rises above circumstances and is not beaten or defeated by problems. Such is the life of those who commit their lives to the Saviour and can therefore say with the apostle Paul, “For me, to live is Christ” - “For as many as are led by the spirit of God, these are the sons of God”.

Emmanuel, God with us: My second area of interest is on the symbolic name “Emmanuel”, which means “God with us”.

What then does Immanuel mean to us? Very soon the year 2018 will draw to a close. And as we prepare to enter another year, everyone is looking for some form of assurance to lean on into the future. We all want some firm assurance that the coming year will be better than the past. Naturally, we all tend to get anxious about the future because we do not know what it has in store for us. For me therefore, what Immanuel means for us is that though we might not be sure of exactly what the year 2019 has in store for us, we can say with conviction on the fact that God is with us; he will never leave us; and he will never forsake us. This is the greatest anchor to lean on into the year 2019. I am very sure that it is on the basis of this same conviction that the apostle Paul wrote, "If God is for us who can be against us" (Romans 8:31)? If God is for us then it also means that God is working for us; all his promises are for us; and in our warfare he is in our camp. This also means that in Christ Jesus God offers himself as a dependable, eternal companion who will be with us at all times. We can confidently say therefore that though challenges may come our way, it will be well because Immanuel, God is with us.

Note: Isaiah 40:31 says: "but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint".

The following quote may serve as a good summary for all that I have said on this point:

Psalm 46:1- 8: God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way. And the mountains fall into the heart of the sea....

The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

On this note, I invite you once again, in the name of He who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to join me pay homage to Jesus our Emmanuel.

On this note, I end my message by wishing us all a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous Happy New Year.