

## **Archpastoral Letter for the Feast of the Nativity 2014**

**The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord  
Thursday, December 25th, 2014**

Dearly Beloved of Our Diocesan Family:  
*Christ is Born! – Let us glorify Him!*

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten  
of the Father, full of grace and truth ... And of His fullness  
we have all received, and grace for grace.” (John 1:14, 16)*

The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord, which we celebrate today, does not simply mark the birth in Bethlehem of a beautiful baby boy, who grows up to be a good and kind man, a great teacher and a holy religious leader. It actually proclaims to the world the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the coming in the flesh of the Son and Word of God to dwell among His people. The Divine Word becomes fully human without ceasing to be fully God; He assumes complete human nature, everything about our humanity, except sin. In One Person, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is both God and Man. Today the Church celebrates this central fact of our faith: the Son of God has appeared on earth as a real human, born of the Virgin Mary, in order to die and rise again to give life to the world.

When St. John the Theologian writes that the Word dwelt among us, he is telling us that He has literally “tabernacled” or “pitched His tent” among us. This recalls the Exodus and Sinai experiences, the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant and Temple, and the visions of the prophets – all places of God’s special appearances, the famous ways in which He revealed Himself in the past. These revelations show us that it is possible to know God, because He truly does reveal Himself. And they show us, too, that when we pray to the Lord in times of need, He does not have to imagine what we are going through – times of trouble or being misunderstood, hunger or poverty, rejection or loneliness, suffering or facing death. He only has to remember, because He has experienced all this Himself – in the fullness of our humanity!

In telling us that “we beheld His glory,” the Gospel reminds us of both Christ’s majesty and His humility: His majesty shown by the signs and wonders He performed and by the Divine Light that radiated from Him on the mount of the Transfiguration ... and also His humble service to mankind, as God, shown most perfectly on the Cross, where He experiences death in the flesh to ransom us from the devil and sin and death. In both ways, He reveals Himself as the One sent from the Father. This divine glory was seen by Moses on Mount Sinai, and by Peter, James and John on Mount Tabor; but it has also been seen by Saints of every age. And many more people have beheld His glory in the countless miracles, both small and great, that He continually works for us the faithful and to help bring those outside into the Faith.

The new-born Savior Jesus is called “the only Begotten Son of God” to make it clear that He Himself is divine. He has the same nature as God the Father. When St. John says that those who receive Him and believe in Him are given the power to become children of God (John 1:12), he means that by grace we can become like Jesus Christ. Our Orthodox Christian life, beginning with baptism, is thus about being children of God, growing spiritually, and being changed into the likeness of Christ. Again, St. John tells us: *“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of*

*God. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He (Christ) is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-2).*

Saint John of Kronstadt summarizes the meaning of the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord when he writes: *"And the Word became flesh! ... in order to make us earthly beings into heavenly ones; in order to make sinners into saints; in order to raise us up from corruption into incorruption, from earth to heaven; from enslavement to sin and the devil into the glorious freedom of children of God; from death into immortality, in order to make us sons of God and to seat us together with Him upon the Throne as His royal children. O boundless compassion of God! O inexpressible wisdom of God! O great wonder, astounding not only the human mind, but the angelic (mind) as well!"*

On this most joyous Feast, let us unite together as a diocesan family, each in his own parish, and raise our voices in hymns of praise of the Incarnate One born of the Theotokos. Let us open our hearts to the gift of His love in His becoming one of us to die for our salvation; and let us renew our commitment to His way of life, begun at our baptism. Come, let us worship Him as our God! ... not just this day, but at every opportunity through the coming new year!

Please be assured of my prayers for each of you, for good health and the choicest of our Lord's blessings, and my love for all the clergy and faithful of our God-protected Diocese.

With my prayers, my blessing and my love,

**+ MICHAEL**

Bishop of New York and the  
Diocese of New York and New Jersey