



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

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Archpastoral Letter for the Feast of the Nativity 2017

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The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord

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

*He lost nothing of the Godhead
and yet became my salvation.
The Healer stooped down to my unbearable pains.
He was mortal, yet God;
of the race of David, yet the maker of Adam;
He wore flesh, yet was beyond bodily form;
He had a Mother, yet she was a Virgin;
He was circumscribed, yet had not limit . . .
He came to the contest as a mortal,
but as the unconquerable One
He vanquished the Tempter. . .
He was sacrifice and celebrant,
sacrificial priest and God Himself.
He offered blood to God to cleanse the entire world.
The Cross lifted Him up
but it was the trap that nailed sin fast.
And yet how can I speak of all His works?*

-- Poem 1.1.2., "On The Son," by St. Gregory Nazianzen

The coming of Our Lord into the world was not like the coming of a sightseer to a strange city. Rather, it was like an artist visiting his own studio, or an author paging through the books he himself has written. For in becoming incarnate, in taking on human flesh ... the Divine Word – the Second Person of the Holy Trinity – was tabernacling Himself in His own creation. As we read in the Gospel of Saint John: *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

Christ, in becoming human, had all the experiences that we have, except for sin. He experienced growing up: He had a Mother and a foster father, who watched Him take His first steps and heard Him say the alphabet and count and pray as a child. As a boy He played with other children and learned carpentry from St. Joseph, and participated in the services in the synagogue and in the Temple. As an adult He had the joys of helping others, casting out their demons and doubts, healing their bodies and souls of sickness, forgiving their sins, and even raising their dead.

On the other hand, in His life He experienced being hungry and thirsty, feeling fatigue and the need for rest. He felt the misery of people's pain and suffering and mourned the death of someone He loved. He was tempted by the evil one and rejected by men. He was criticized for the unique way He did things. He was called names and lied about, mocked and rejected and hated. He was dismissed from people's homes, cast out of synagogues, and expelled from cities. Ultimately He was betrayed and brought to unjust trials. He was imprisoned, scourged and crucified. He suffered the agony of death on the Cross. He experienced His body being laid in a tomb and His soul descending to Hades. To all of this, He surrendered Himself in order to be victorious over sin, the devil, and death – all for our salvation.

The message of Christmas is that the Incarnation of the Son of God, born this day in the flesh for our salvation, is as important for us today as it was for the world two thousand years ago. Ours is the God Who fully lived the human experience, such that when we pray to Him, especially in our trials and tribulations – our sicknesses and suffering – in the face of loneliness or pain, or death itself – He does not have to imagine what we are going through ... He only has to remember. And in remembering, He extends to us the healing, the forgiveness, the promise of eternal life that His love for mankind brought about when He became incarnate.

This Christmas, my prayer for you is that you and your loved ones will receive from Him all of the blessings and the joys that come from His hands ... and that you, in turn – by your improved prayer life, in more faithful reading of the Scriptures and attendance at divine services, and by your more regular reception of the Holy Mysteries – will come ever closer to the Incarnate God Who loves us more than we love ourselves.

With love in the Newborn Savior,

+ Michael

Archbishop of New York and the
Diocese of New York and New Jersey