



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA  
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## ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY 2021

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Feast of the Nativity 2021

Beloved Members of our Diocesan Family:  
***Christ is Born! – Let us glorify Him!***

*“ ... they departed into their own country  
another way.” (Matthew 2:12)*

The Gospel for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord ends with these words regarding the Wise Men from the East: *“Then, having been warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country by another way.”* These words are of great significance: ***another way.***

Of course, the Magi went another route to avoid Herod; but mystically, this means there is *another way to live*, and the Wise Men discovered it ... Because Christ is born, there is *another way to be*. Indeed, my brothers and sisters in Christ, there is another way – not the way of the world, not the way of earthly living, not the way of death – there is another way: that of the Kingdom, of heavenly things, of eternal life. And we are celebrating today that the Son of God came down from Heaven, became incarnate, and became the God-man, so that we could have His *other way* to live.

Think about it for a moment – how easy it is for us to get angry, how easily we become lazy about holy things, how diligent we are about things that don't really matter. In all honesty, doesn't it seem like we are too often living the way of the world?

But that was not what we were born for. We were born to follow *another way*.

You and I were born for eternal life – and eternal life is to be in God and with God, to be united with Him, and not with the world that is *“passing away, along with its desires”* (1 John 2:17). We were born to know Jesus Christ the Savior personally, intimately, striving to become like Him in our very lives. Yes, there is much that must take place for us to become Christ-like. Yet He gives us the ability to do this ... but He does not force us. He will strengthen our free will, but He does not dictate the direction of our will, of our choices. We do. We must *desire* to follow the other way. And if we desire Him more than we want the world, then we will become who we were born to be.

I remember when I first came to realize that the Baby Jesus was born into this world to die. When we look at Him in the manger, we see Someone Whose purpose in life as a human being was to die – so that we could live. We, though, were not born to die; we were created to be fully alive. But we cannot be fully alive, truly human, until we become like Christ – because we were created to have Christ in us. That is the *other way* ... not the way of the world.

As baptized and chrismated Orthodox Christians, we are called by God and gifted by His grace to live our life with the power He has given us – differently from the rest of the world, differently from our passions, differently from our own motivations. We are called to be “holy” as He is holy ... so that by being changed from the way of the world, we can become a deified, Christ-like human person.

This, my friends, is the purpose of the Incarnation. The Apostle Paul makes this crystal clear in the Epistle that is read on the Feast of the Nativity: *“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ”* (Galatians 4:5-7).

Our Lord is the Son of God by nature, eternally. We are not children of God by nature – we are adopted into sonship. With this adoption, we are not treated as slaves or servants, but with God’s steadfast love, entirely as His children. Our response to this love necessitates a change in the way we think, the way we live, the priorities that we have, and how we spend our time. This means that we must live a different way, *another way*.

My beloved, we are to become like God and be united with Him ... do godly things and have an intimate knowledge of the Lord, be one with Him in purpose, in wisdom, and in holiness. This is the way – and it is possible for us today.

As we celebrate the Glorious Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, let us follow the Magi to the feet of the Infant Messiah and worship Him in our Church. As they left Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, let us offer Him our gifts of time, talent, and treasure all the days of our life ... and join the Wise Men as they leave behind their pagan ways and depart another way. Let us change the course of our life to *another way*, the way of Christ – the way of the One Who loves us more than we love ourselves.

I pray that you all have a joyous celebration of the Birth of Our Savior and a new year filled with all the blessings that come from the hands of the Incarnate God.

With my humble prayers, archpastoral blessings and sincere love in the Infant Messiah,

*f Michael*

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