

Orthodox Church in America • Diocese of New York and New Jersey

Archpastoral Letter for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord 2012

Beloved Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the God-saved Diocese of New York and New Jersey:

Christ is Born! – Let us glorify Him!

Once again we come upon the “*most wonderful time of the year,*” as the song goes. What exactly does this mean? For some, it is simply the winter holiday season – Frosty and Rudolph. For most, it is probably all about Santa, and making a list, and getting great gifts. Certainly for many others, Christmas is about the birth of a beautiful baby in Bethlehem ... who grew up to be a great teacher, a gentle healer, perhaps even a miracle worker.

But for us who are Orthodox Christians, the Feast of the Nativity is much more than all that. It is the coming in the flesh of the Son of God. It is the ultimate proof of God’s unimaginable love for us: “*God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16). It is the fulfillment of the promise made by that God out of love so long ago: “*But 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*” (Galatians 4:4).

Why exactly did it happen that way? Because it had to; there was no other way for mankind to be saved – from sin and death and eternity with the evil one. Our salvation lay not in education or economics, not in politics or power. It could be found only in Christ – the Savior, the Son of God Incarnate. Saint Gregory of Nyssa explains it this way:

“Our nature was sick and needed a doctor.

Man had fallen and needed someone to raise him up.

He who ceased to participate in the good needed someone to bring him back to it.

He who was shut in darkness needed the presence of life.

The prisoner was looking for someone to ransom him;

The captive for someone to take his part.

He who was under the yoke of slavery was looking for someone to set him free.”

The salvation that is gifted to us by the coming of the Infant Messiah is a spiritual, inner salvation, which in turn can produce an outer salvation. Changed people can produce changed parishes ... a changed society. The grace and fulfillment we are all seeking can be found in a relationship with God that only Our Lord and Savior can bring. He offers us this hope: “*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you*” (John 14:27).

The Son of God did not come to condemn us because we had become enslaved to sin. He came to save us by breaking the bonds of sin and death. In this season of wonder, let us thank the Father for His unspeakable Gift, Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ ... and live our life forever changed by His coming – turning from sin, loving Him, serving Him, glorifying Him each and every day.

With my prayers, my blessings and my love,

+ M I C H A E L

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

NAIVTY OF

OUR LORD

