

NATIVITY OF CHRIST 2005

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

To the Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of
The Orthodox Church in America

Dearly Beloved in the Lord:

“All the angels in heaven are of good cheer and greatly rejoice today! The whole creation leaps with joy, for the Savior and Lord is born in Bethlehem!
Every error of idolatry has ceased, and Christ reigns unto all ages!”

Nativity Litiya



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As we celebrate the birth of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, we join our voices with those of the angels in praising the One Who took on our human nature in order to renew us and all creation, that we might become “partakers of His divine nature, as Saint Peter reminds us. This is indeed a reason to be “of good cheer” and to “greatly rejoice!”

Yet the world in which we live so often fails to delight in this wonder, this unspeakable joy. Too often, the very mention of Christ and His birth is often surrounded with controversy. There are those who would reduce the pivotal event in mankind’s history to one of many “holidays” to be privately and quietly observed, but never proclaimed. While “Christ reigns unto all ages,” the idolatry which His incarnation erased continues to exist, challenging those who see Him as “the Wonderful Counselor, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” to be all the more fervent in proclaiming that “God is with us” not only with their words, but most importantly, by their actions and deeds.

The ministry of Christ was hardly a private one. He preached to vast throngs of people. He healed the sick in the presence of many. He revealed the fullness of truth to all who would listen and accept His invitation to “come and see.” The message of repentance and forgiveness revealed in His parables and miracles was sealed by the very blood He shed in His very public passion and death. His resurrection, announced to thousands in Jerusalem on the great day of Pentecost and to the whole world in the days that followed, opened the doors to a greater reality – eternal life in the Kingdom.

We recall the words of the Prophet Isaiah, “He came unto His own, yet His own knew Him not.” The Gospel Christ proclaimed was – and still is – surrounded in controversy, precisely because it challenges the “error of idolatry” that insists that this world, and not the world to come, offers all that is necessary, all that is real, all that man needs to attain “fulfillment” and “self actualization.” The earthly cares Christ challenges us to lay aside – beginning with the idolatrous desire to see ourselves rather than God as the center of all things – remain obstacles to discerning His will, to sharing His life, and to partaking of His divine nature.

In today's world, so burdened with wars, natural disasters, "political correctness," and an overall lack of loving-kindness, it is easy to succumb to temptation and doubt. It becomes all too easy to focus on earthly cares rather than heavenly delights. The incarnation invites us to look beyond these burdens, to recognize that while we still live in a fallen world, the victorious Kingdom yet to come is already fully present to us in the Church, if only we respond to Christ's call: "Come... and I will give you rest." It is in this light that all the angels of heaven are of good cheer as they announce to mankind that freedom from selfishness and isolation from its Creator has been lovingly granted to all who, fleeing the idolatry of this life, freely seek and accept the gift of eternal life discovered in the fullness of Bethlehem's cave and, at the same time, in the emptiness of Jerusalem's tomb.

It is my prayer that this year's celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord will be filled with the joy that comes when we truly repent, when we truly strive to lay aside the world's idols and passing concerns, when we discern that Christ indeed "reigns unto all ages." May we, now and in the year to come, flee from the temptation to bear our burdens without Him. Let us recommit ourselves to embracing His very presence in our midst with renewed zeal and conviction, striving to become the "light of the world" He calls us to be.

With love in the Newborn Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized cross symbol followed by the word "Herman" in a cursive script.

+HERMAN

Archbishop of Washington and New York
Metropolitan of All America and Canada