



Nativity of Christ 2009

Archpastoral Message of His Beatitude, Metropolitan JONAH

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

We rejoice in the coming of the Savior, the Advent of the Son of God into this broken world. His Nativity anticipates and prefigures His Second and Glorious Coming again in the flesh, not clothed in the swaddling bands of humility, for but a few years; but in the radiant vesture of the Kingdom to reign forever.

For us Orthodox Christians, the Nativity of Christ is the Winter Pascha, and our celebration is rooted in the liturgical life of the Church; the world's "Xmas" hymns go on and on, oblivious, rather intentionally, to the point of the celebration. While we enjoy the worldly celebration, the family time, the gifts and giving, these are empty if we miss the central celebration itself: the services of the Nativity, culminating in receiving the Holy Mysteries. We can have Christmas without the Nativity, as does the world; but for Christians the Feast of the Nativity is Christmas!

We pray and fast to prepare ourselves for forty days before Christmas not only to be obedient to the Church, but to prepare ourselves to receive the Mystery of Communion. Will this Christmas be unto salvation, discerning and receiving His Body – that same Body born of Mary and laid in the Manger, the Son of God who has taken flesh and likened himself to us, so that He might liken us to Himself? Or do we judge ourselves, unaware or oblivious to the Mystery of Christ's assumption of our nature. We pray and fast to open our spiritual eyes, so that we can see Christ, discern Christ, know Christ – not just as a historical figure who taught nice things, but as God who has come and will come again.

The traditional Christmas carols talk about Baby Jesus lying in the manger. Let us contemplate this mystery during this season, a mystery that at that time only His Mother

really understood: that this little infant, no different than any other, would become the Savior of the world, and redeem mankind, indeed all of creation, from death. What infinite potential, the potential of a man fulfilling the Divine Likeness, and manifesting God in His flesh, was invested in that little child. Who would have thought that a child born in the most destitute poverty and anonymity would become the criterion of judgment for the whole world?

We can also contemplate this same mystery in the life of every child. Who knows what the destiny of that child will be? Who can tell if he or she will become a point of hope for the whole world? That same infinite potential, the potential for deification, the potential for a life transfigured by God, the potential for a life that will bring joy and peace, or beget such a child?

The Feast of the Nativity is not only the contemplation of God taking human flesh. It is also the great celebration of humanity, that God so loved as to become one of us, that through that One, joy and peace and salvation may be given to the whole world. Let us treasure the life of every child, who is the image of Christ born of the Virgin, and remember the great calling which he or she, and each of us, has in God. Let us also remember that the ultimate fulfillment of that calling is found in the transformation of our very flesh, in which God became incarnate, that having become man for our sake, He enables us to partake of His Divinity on that glorious day of His coming again in the flesh.

With love in the Newborn Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the name 'Jonah' in a cursive script.

+ JONAH
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada