



December 25, 2025

12/001

To the clergy, monastics, and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, beloved children in the Lord,

When it was time for thy coming upon earth, the first taxation of the world was held; and then thou madest ready to enroll the names of all who believed in thy birth. For this cause Caesar published such a decree, since thy timeless and eternal kingdom was newly made manifest.

– St. Germanus, Doxastichon at the Praises, tone six

Christ is born! Glorify him!

In one of her most famed hymns, the venerable Cassia draws parallels between the reign of Caesar and the reign of Christ: “When Augustus reigned alone upon earth,” she says, “the many kingdoms of men came to an end,” and when Christ was born in that reign, the many gods of the nations were done away. As the many cities of the world passed under one rule, all the nations came to believe in one God.

The relationship between these two reigns, two rules – that of Rome and that of Christ – goes beyond poetic parallels, however. Divine providence arranged for the birth of the Lord at precisely the right moment, when the Pax Romana, the peace secured by the ascendancy of the Roman Empire, ensured that the Good News of Jesus Christ could travel freely throughout the Mediterranean world, from Jerusalem to Italy, to Gaul and North Africa, and beyond it, to barbarian lands and the Persian Empire.

At the same time, we must not forget the role played by Roman rule also at the end of the Savior’s earthly life, when the Lord gave himself up for the life of the world: he was flogged by Roman soldiers, condemned by a Roman governor, pierced by a Roman lance. In the end, it was a Roman officer who recognized what had taken place: “Truly this was the Son of God.”



Roman imperial authority paved the way for the coming of Christ in the flesh and made possible the apostolic preaching of the Gospel; this same authority sentenced God himself to death. Thus, Rome occupies an ambivalent place in the tradition of the Church; as a symbol, it is bivalent. On the one hand, we speak of the New Rome and the Third Rome: the reign of Christ established on earth in Roman garb. Our bishops, with their eagle rugs and their sakkoi, still bear the trappings of Eastern Roman emperors.

On the other hand, in New Testament—in St. Peter's first epistle and St. John's Apocalypse (1 Pet. 5:13; Rev. 17–18 et passim)—we see Rome equated with Babylonian harlotry, with the old Jerusalem that kills the prophets and rejects those sent to her. Rome appears both as the city of God on earth and the supreme city of the world, the dominion of the flesh and of the devil.

However, St. Germanus of Constantinople, in the doxastichon I quote above, offers a new and higher perspective. He does not only draw parallels, as does St. Cassia; neither does he assign Roman rule an incidental, albeit providential, role. Instead, he views Rome as the direct instrument of God: "For this cause Caesar published such a decree," so that the kingdom of God might appear and Christ might enroll his faithful in the book of life. Whatever else Caesar's decree may have done, whatever Caesar may have intended, the cause for that decree was determined by God, and it was part of his holy design, his plan; God's providence was the agent, the decisive factor.

When God made the world out of nothing, he did so in order that the world might come to know him and love him, and so that he could show his love to the world—so that he could love the world. This does not apply only to the world as an abstract whole; it applies to each of us, who are microcosms, little worlds unto ourselves. God loves each of us with his whole love; in love, he made everything for each of us—for me and for you. As St. Paul says, "all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21–23).

All of history points toward the coming of Christ; all the actors on the world stage, all the empires of men, all the civilizations from furthest antiquity to the end of the world: all of this has existed, exists, and will exist solely for the sake of his First and Second Coming. Moreover, since his Coming was for our sake—not his own, since, in his divine aseity, he has no need of anything—this means that all the world exist for us, for each of us—for me and for you. All of history took place, takes place, will take place, for your sake.

Rome stands as a potent symbol of all this history, of the entire world of human events. Thus, it is inevitable that Rome both serves as a vehicle of the Gospel and an instrument of the Passion, both as an ally and an enemy of Christ. The Church, in her earthly sojourn, has known the two aspects of Rome as well: the Rome of Diocletian and the Rome of Constantine; the Rome of the catacombs and the Rome of the Hagia Sophia.

So it is in our own lives. Sometimes the circumstances of life bring us joy, sometimes they bring us pain. But no matter what happens to us, we must know, as the great spiritual testament attributed to St. Seraphim of Vyritsa says, that all of this was from the hand of the loving God. Every weal, every

woe, every ease, every hardship: all of this was from him. Without all these events, known and unknown, past, present, and future, you would not be who you are. All of this is a gift from God to you, so that you could receive a still greater gift: God himself.

Today he appears as a newborn Child in the arms of his most pure Mother; soon she shall bear him to the temple of sacrifice, and thence to exile in Egypt. Thus, both in happiness and in trials, let us imitate her in always extending to him our heart's embrace. Holding him close, we will come to understand, with St. Germanus and St. Seraphim, that everything that has taken place, from the very beginning of time, has happened so that we could come to this moment, to this cave, to this manger, and experience the Advent of God in the flesh. Everything has happened so that he could be ours, and we could be his.

To our infant Savior, the Creator and Sustainer of all, the true Love of our hearts, our deepest Desire, the Fulfillment of our being: to him be all love and adoration, together with his Father and his All-holy Spirit, throughout the ages of this world and unto endless eternity.

Greeting you with the joy of Christ's Nativity,
With my primatial prayers and blessing,

+Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada