



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

2014 NATIVITY MESSAGE OF BISHOP-ELECT PAUL

Beloved Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Diocese of the Midwest:

Christ is Born — Glorify Him!

“Today God, Who by nature cannot be seen, is seen in the flesh for our sake.”

Litya Verse from the Nativity Compline Service

“It was for this therefore that He became openly visible, to lead forth those of the visible world to the invisible.”

St. Gregory the Wonderworker, Discourse on the Nativity

The above citations from the Compline Service and St. Gregory are so important for us to internalize in our hearts as we celebrate the Great Feast of the Nativity of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. We live in a world today where there is a growing polarization of people over many issues such as culture, ideology, morality, religious practices, politics etc. Where there once seemed to be tolerance and mutual respect, there is a growing spirit of intolerance, hatred, and sectarianism that is permeating our world. It would be a mistake to conclude that our parishes in Midwest Diocese are not affected by the above realities in our world today. What does the Feast of our Lord’s Nativity offer us this day to help us address these issues in our daily lives?

First we need to see that in this Mystery of God becoming Man, our Lord identifies with the whole of our fallen humanity. He identifies with us and becomes fully man for all; whether we are conservative or liberal, white or black, capitalist or socialist, high church or low church, cradle or convert, etc. The Church has had to address these realities since the time of the Apostles (just read Galatians, 1 Corinthians, or Acts, and you will see what I mean). But our Lord in assuming our fallen nature refashions and recreates us so that we might transcend the visible and find our fulfillment as human beings in the world that is invisible. Thus the Litya verse from Compline also says:

“Today heaven and earth are united, for Christ is born. Today God has come to earth and man ascends to heaven.”

In His person, the eternally begotten Son of God becomes the Son of man and assumes our fallen nature to fulfill our true humanity in His Kingdom. He

transcends the sectarianism and polarities of our time by becoming the New Adam, the “first-born from the dead.” Our entire fallen humanity is recreated and united in Christ. St. Gregory makes this point in his discourse,

“The Ancient of Days is become a Child, to make people children of God.”

The Prophet Isaiah and St. Paul speak of the fruit of this reality in verses that are read during the services of the Nativity:

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt or destroy in my entire holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” Isaiah 11:6-9

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:27-28

The incarnation of Our Lord teaches us how we can address the fallen realities of our time in our witness to the Truth in love. His Nativity shows us that all we believe, teach, and do in the Church is intimately tied to its fulfillment in His Kingdom. The minute we separate this relationship we end up preaching religion, ideology, or legislated moral codes. They become ends in themselves and thus idols; this has nothing to do with gospel, the Good News of Christ’s life-creating Death, and His Glorious Resurrection.

I pray that the Lord continue to enlighten us in our celebration of the Great Feast of His Holy Nativity and upcoming Holy Theophany. I also ask your prayers for me as I approach with fear and trembling, my upcoming consecration to be your Arch-Pastor in this Vineyard, which has been established by the Right Hand of the Lord.

May the Nativity of Our Lord bring you blessings, joy, and peace.



The unworthy Archimandrite Paul
Bishop-elect of Chicago and the Midwest

To be read during Nativity services and/or circulated among the faithful of the Diocese.