



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

2021 NATIVITY MESSAGE OF ARCHBISHOP PAUL

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

Christ is Born! — Glorify Him!

Man was made in the image of God, but he sinned, and lost immortality. He fell from the divine and better life, enslaved completely by corruption. Now the wise Creator fashions him again, for He has been glorified.

(Verse from Ode 1 of the Nativity Canon)

This verse from the Nativity Canon underscores the reality of what we continually deal with in the Christian life. It seems like we need to repeatedly visit this verse, as we don't seem to get it. I fear that our Diocese and our churches continue to be affected by polarizing issues. These issues continue to revolve around ideology, morality, religious practices, politics, and now how to address the continuing pandemic with its new variants. Many have told me that they are weary of dealing with the latter issue. They are sick and tired of talking about it. People just want to move on and focus on the Gospel and the spiritual well being of our people. But the disagreement continues in the Diocese over how to move on.

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, pro-mask or anti-mask, and pro-vaccine, or anti-vaccine. 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 the Wonderworker makes this point in his discourse on the Nativity:

“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. As to the continuing challenges the variants of Covid present us, I wish we could find a way to discuss these concerns in light of the teachings of our Faith. By not doing so, all of the above issues 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. Please pray for me.

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

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The unworthy Archbishop Paul

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