



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

1 September 2022

The Beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year – The Indiction

№. 113

Your Nativity, O Virgin, has proclaimed joy to the whole universe! The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God has shone from You, O Theotokos! By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing. By destroying death, He has granted us eternal Life.
–Troparion of the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos

Dear Fathers and Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For Orthodox Christians, September 1st marks the beginning of the New Church Year. As we enter into this New Year of Grace, the first Great Feast that is celebrated is the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos, September 8.

In reflecting on the birth of Mary and her singular role in the history of salvation, we see that the Gospel of John speaks of only two moments when the life of Jesus intersects with that of his Mother. Although Mary's life was intimately connected to that of her Son from the very moment of His conception and although Matthew and Luke make special note of this, John mentions only two occasions of interaction between the Lord and His mother: the beginning of the Lord's public ministry at the wedding feast in Cana (John 2:1-12) and the moment when Mary stands beneath the cross (John 19:25-27). Perhaps the Holy Evangelist wants to show us the Mother of Jesus in these two apparently opposite situations in life—the bright joy and hopes of a wedding feast and the profound sorrow at the death of a child.

In recounting the narrative of the Lord's Passion and Death, the first detail John mentions is that Mary "stands near the cross of Jesus" (John 19:25), close to her Son as He suffered the pains of the Cross and shed His blood for our salvation. Mary stood at the foot of the cross, filled with sorrow, yet with unwavering faith, courage, and fidelity. This is the principal way that Mary is seen in the Gospel of John—she stands near those who suffer, those from whom the world flees or those whom the world sets aside or marginalizes, those who suffer any sorrow or loss and those who are on the very fringes of our society. It is in her role as mother that Mary also stands close by every one of her son's disciples, steadfast and faithful beneath their crosses of challenge, struggle, and suffering.

Mary also shows us how to follow her example and "stand near" these situations. This means more than simply acknowledging the realities of human suffering. Rather, it means that those in painful situations should know that we are standing faithfully at their side. All those suffer any pain or loss can experience the Mother who remains near them, for in their sufferings she sees the open wounds of her Son Jesus. She learned this at the foot of the cross. We too are called to be near the sufferings of others. Following the example of the Theotokos, let us go

out to meet our suffering brothers and sisters, to console them and accompany them. Let us not be afraid to be involved and to let our lives become complicated for the sake of others. Inspired by Her, the Most Pure One, let us remain steadfast and faithful, our hearts at peace in God in even the most difficult circumstances of life. Let us be ever ready to lift up the fallen, raise up the lowly, showing them the love and the “peace beyond understanding” that comes from God (Philippians 4:7).

Acknowledging that the beginning of September brings with it this special Feast, let us also acknowledge that every day of every year, no matter the month or the season, offers us the blessed opportunity to give thanks to God for His many blessings, just as each day presents the opportunity to be present with those who are suffering in any way. Every day of every year invites us to draw closer to Christ, to grow in holiness, to bear witness to our faith, and to minister to the suffering world in which we live. As we enter into the New Church Year, we look forward to another Year of Grace, living the Gospel, serving our brothers and sisters, and living the Church’s liturgical cycle which invites to enter, ever more deeply, into the great mystery of our salvation.

As we celebrate her nativity at the beginning of this new ecclesiastical year, let us entrust our Diocese, parishes, our families and loved ones, and all the world to the loving maternal care and protection of the Most Holy Theotokos.

With love in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+ Daniel". The plus sign is a simple cross, and the name "Daniel" is written in a fluid, connected hand.

+DANIEL

Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest