



Orthodox Church in America  
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

Sunday, 25 December 2023  
*The Nativity according to the Flesh  
of Our Lord, God, and Savior  
JESUS CHRIST*  
№. 161

**ARCHPASTORAL MESSAGE OF THE MOST REVEREND DANIEL,  
ARCHBISHOP OF CHICAGO AND THE MIDWEST,  
ON THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST**

Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers, Venerable Monastics, and Beloved Faithful,

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light”* (Isaiah 9:2).

As we gather in the spirit of joy to celebrate the Nativity of Christ, these words of the holy Prophet Isaiah resound once again in our ears and in our hearts. Year after year, this ancient yet ever-new prophecy takes on renewed significance as we contemplate the mystery of Our Savior’s birth. In the Gospel of Saint Luke, we recall how the watchful shepherds, tending to their flocks in the dark of night in the hills of Bethlehem, suddenly experienced “the glory of the Lord shining on them” (*Luke 2:9*). The prevailing darkness of this world was pierced by a heavenly brightness: Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, who even now continues to enlighten the darkness of our earthly existence.

How do we today come to experience this Light, which dispels darkness and destroys it? We encounter it primarily as Divine Love: that Love which has altered the course of history, freed us from evil, filled our hearts with peace and joy, and brought life to the world. In the darkness of our night, the Love of God has been revealed to us: it is Jesus, the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary. He is “God’s love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (*Romans 5:5*).

Yes, “the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all people” (*Titus 2:11*): in our jubilant celebration of the Lord’s birth, we take to heart that Christ our Lord irrupted into human lives and affairs as we went about our usual business, and radically changed all things. The grace of God, this unmerited and transformative gift, continues to be given to us in the Person of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. The Feast of the Nativity

poignantly reminds us that God's love is unceasing, and that it outlasts the most harrowing circumstances and the worst instances of human sin. It is this love for mankind that we find encapsulated in the well-known words of the Gospel of St John: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (*John 3:16*).

The love of God, revealed in his Son by the Holy Spirit, is neither conditional nor temporary, and does not depend on us or our "worthiness." Even when we fall into sin, God continues to love us—but how often do we wrongly perceive God's goodness as a response to our virtue, or divine punishment in our misfortunes! Yet despite our weakness and sinfulness, God's love remains steadfast: it does not change nor is it fickle; it is faithful and ever patient. This is this incomparable gift that we encounter as we celebrate the Nativity of Christ. Each year, we remember and celebrate that the Lord has revealed himself to us as absolute, tender, and unfailing Love. His glory does not overwhelm us; rather, he is born in complete and utter poverty to bring all of his creation into the abundant wealth of his love.

Beloved Flock, "the grace of God has appeared" to shine forth in your life, in your hearts, and in the world we inhabit. Receive this grace as the unmerited gift of God's love, and the light of Christ, born on this sacred night, will shine forth in you and through you, piercing the darkness that envelops this world.

Be assured of my fervent prayers and best wishes for you and all your loved ones during this holy season. May your celebration of the Lord's birth may be adorned with radiance and joy, and may the coming New Year be enriched with abundant blessings, through the unceasing prayers and intercessions of our Most Holy and Most Pure Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary.

With love in the Newborn Savior,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel".

**DANIEL**

Archbishop of Chicago and the Midwest