



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

Wednesday, 25 December 2024

The Nativity of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ

№. 200

ARCHPASTORAL GREETINGS OF
THE MOST REVEREND DANIEL
ARCHBISHOP OF CHICAGO AND THE MIDWEST

ON THE RADIANT FEAST OF OUR LORD'S NATIVITY - 25 DECEMBER 2024

*Make ready, O Bethlehem!
Let the manger be prepared!
Let the cave show its welcome!
The Truth comes and the shadow flees.
God is born of a Virgin and is revealed to men.
He is clothed in our flesh and makes it divine.
Therefore Adam is renewed and cries out with Eve:
"Thy favor has appeared on earth, O Lord,
for the salvation of the human race."*

(from the Royal Hours of the Nativity of Christ)

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

“God is born of a Virgin and is revealed to men”: as we sing these words, we recall the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. Gathering in these holy days to celebrate in the churches and chapels throughout our Diocese, to reflect upon this great mystery, let us also turn our thoughts to the one who was instrumental in fulfilling God’s plan for our salvation: Mary, the “One who gave birth to God the Word” and “truly Theotokos.”

We are first introduced to Mary of Nazareth at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke when, just after having spoken her “yes” to the angel in the moment of the Annunciation, she begins her trip “in great haste” from her hometown of Nazareth to the hill country of Judah, to be with her elderly relative Elizabeth in her time of need. The angel Gabriel had revealed to Mary that Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy (Luke 1:26-38). This explains why Mary, who carried within her an even greater mystery, goes to see Elizabeth and stays with her for three months, until Elizabeth gives birth to John, the Forerunner and Baptizer of Christ.

In the meeting between these two women, it is the young one, Mary, who offers the first greeting. The Gospel tells us: “she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth” (Luke 1:40). After this greeting, Elizabeth feels enveloped in great wonder as she is filled with the Holy Spirit. This wonder and joy is echoed in her response to Mary: “And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

In celebrating the Nativity, we ourselves are called to recognize the moments of the miraculous which are part of our daily lives. And what are these miraculous moments in everyday life? The first place is in *the other*, in those around us, in whom we recognize a brother or sister, because since the birth of Jesus occurred, every human face is marked with the image of the Son of God. Above all, we encounter this miraculous presence of Christ in the

face of the poor, because God Himself entered the world poor, and it was to the poor, in the first place, that He revealed Himself.

Another place in which we recognize the miraculous is within history, the chronicle of human life and experience. However, we run the risk of reading history backwards and outside of its Christian context. For example, we generally think that history is defined by the rise and fall of governments, wars and conflicts, regulated by business and finances, and dominated by the powers of this world. But it is God, the God of Creation who entered human life, who defines and rules over human history. As Mary sings in the *Magnificat*, it is the Lord who puts down the mighty from their thrones and exalts those of low degree, who fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty (Luke 1:52-53).

Yet another miraculous encounter is within the Church. To perceive the Church as miraculous means not limiting oneself to consider it only as a religious institution, but to embrace the Church as a mother who, despite any blemishes and wrinkles, allows the features of the beloved Bride of Christ the Lord to shine through—a Church that is able to recognize the signs of faithful love that God continuously sends her. This is the Church that always has her doors open wide, and her arms open to welcome everyone. Moreover, the Church, our Mother, goes out from her own doors to seek with a loving smile and warm embrace all those who are far off in order to bring them to the mercy of God. The Church herself provides this miraculous moment which we are invited to experience in these holydays of light and love.

God has given us all of Himself by giving His Only Son, who is all His joy. It is only with the heart of Mary, the humble and poor daughter of Zion, who became the Mother of the Son of the Most High, that it is possible to rejoice and be glad for the great gift of God and for His unpredictable surprise. Through the birth of Jesus, may she help us to perceive the miraculous which surrounds us every day—in our brothers and sisters, in the lived experience of history, and within the Church. In the birth of Jesus may we recognize the Gift of Gifts, the undeserved Gift who brings us His salvation.

In the spiritual atmosphere of joy and peace of the Nativity of Christ, I greet all of you with the joy of the Feast. Once again, I state my prayerful wish for peace: peace in families and homes, peace in parishes, peace in the ministry of our clergy and faithful, and peace for those who are suffering the horrors of war throughout the world, especially our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and in the Middle East.

As you gather with family, with your parish communities, and with all your loved ones, I send you my sincere fatherly greetings and archpastoral blessings. May the Lord grant you a bright and blessed celebration of the Birth of Christ and a New Year filled with an abundance of heavenly blessings.

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

With love in the Incarnate Son of God,

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

DANIEL

Archbishop of Chicago and the Midwest