

## NATIVITY MESSAGE, DECEMBER 2009

*Joy to the World* is sung during the season of the Nativity of Christ to remind us that joy and thankfulness can still abound. During the Advent Fast, the Church turns its attention to prayer in preparation for the coming of Emanuel (from the Greek form of Hebrew “Immanu’el,” literally meaning “God is with us”). According to \*St. Gregory the Theologian, God by coming into the world brings us two great gifts: First, He unites His Divine Nature with human nature, bringing the potential of holiness and divinity to our human bodies, hearts, and minds. Secondly, He mysteriously unites human flesh and human nature with the Most Holy Trinity.

At the time of the Incarnation of Christ, mankind was living in darkness. Throughout the ages, God had prepared His chosen ones of Israel to receive the light of the world; but most were not prepared to accept this gift, and because of this, *there was no room at the Inn*. This profound prayer from the Nativity Service tells us, “The cave becomes Heaven and the Virgin is the Throne of the Cherubim” [**Nativity Megalananion**]. Humanity was not prepared to receive the Eternal Light. An example of this lack of preparation is illustrated by King Herod’s response when he hears of the birth of the King of Israel. He sends out his soldiers to find and kill the child. Has anything changed in today’s world?

The words Christmas season, holiday season, and winter season are used as expressions for shopping and vacation patterns. We are all susceptible to the constant reminders that come through the internet, television, and radio. Our habits are filled with ideas of buying presents we cannot afford, and eating and drinking to such an extent that starting with January 2<sup>nd</sup>, we want to lose the weight we gained preparing for Christmas. St Nicholas has been turned into Santa Claus, the greatest gift-giver in the history of the world, and what is good for ‘ole St Nick is good for all of us, especially for our economy. In all seriousness, though, how do we cast aside the pull of the world and return to the meaning of the Nativity of Christ? How do we reset priorities and again look for the Birth of Salvation?

For those who seek the truth of the Incarnation of Christ, a profound understanding of the Nativity lies within the cycle of the Nativity services of the Church. \*Saint Romanos the Melodist writes: “Bethlehem has opened Eden: Come, let us behold. We have found joy in this hidden place: Come, and let us take possession of the paradise that is within the cave. There the unwatered Root has appeared and flowers forth forgiveness: There is found the undug Well, when David of old yearned to drink [**2 Kings 23:15**]. There the Virgin has borne a babe, and caused the thirst of Adam and David to cease straightway. Therefore, let us hasten to this place where now a young child is born, the pre-eternal God” [**Matins Service for Nativity, written in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century**].

Oftentimes during the Christmas season, activities such as dinners and parties take the place of going to church. We sometimes hear, “I am exhausted from my life and I need a break!” If we remember to give unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and unto God that which is God’s, we will understand that we owe God everything and that we owe Caesar only that which is necessary to purchase in order to survive in this world. “But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” [**Mathew 6:33**]. For the secularized world, Advent is a time for shopping or celebrating, but for the Church of Christ it is a time to push away from the festivities and repent. Fasting helps us realize how dependent we are on God. If we realize this dependence, we will know the importance of seeking the Light of the Nativity.

\*St. John of Kronstadt, who lived in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russia, conveys in his Nativity homily: “Thus, God did appear in the flesh: Rejoice and be exceeding glad; O earth: Rejoice and celebrate, ye earth-born. The Creator Himself did come to you, in order to create you anew, to restore you who were corrupted by transgressions. To you did He come: The almighty Physician Himself, powerful to treat all the inveterate afflictions of sin, in order that He might heal all the passions of the soul and all the infirmities of the body, all of the which He truly did do, as we know from the Gospel and from the history of the Church.”

May the light of the Nativity shine deeply within each of you.

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\*See: “[http://www.trueorthodoxy.info/pat\\_nativity\\_of\\_Christ\\_voND97.shtml](http://www.trueorthodoxy.info/pat_nativity_of_Christ_voND97.shtml)”

