



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

2018 NATIVITY MESSAGE OF HIS GRACE, BISHOP PAUL

“For today I see equality of honor between heaven and earth, and a way for all those below to things above, matching the condescension of those on high. However great the heaven of heavens may be, or the upper waters which form a roof over the celestial regions, or any heavenly place, state, or order, they are by no more marvelous or honorable than the cave, the manger, the water sprinkled on the Infant and His swaddling clothes. For nothing done by God from the beginning of time was more beneficial to all or more divine than Christ’s nativity, which we celebrate today.... He Who is by nature Lord of all is now ranked with the servants and enrolled with them (Luke 2:1-6), clearly making humble service to others no less honorable than the exercise of lordship, or rather, showing the servants as having greater honor than the earthly ruler at that time.”—St. Gregory Palamas, Sermon on the Nativity

TO ALL CLERGY, MONASTICS, AND LAITY OF THE DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

These words of St. Gregory Palamas portray a wonderful icon of earth and heaven. It also points to the supreme act of condescension where the Uncontainable God, contained in the Virgin’s womb is now born into the world “for us men and for our salvation.” For “nothing was more beneficial to all or more divine than Christ’s nativity.”

This is why we fast, say our prayers, go to Confession, attend services, and give alms during the fasting season; it is to do away with the false dichotomy between the earthly and the spiritual. One is not lesser than the other; the created things of this world are not sinful. We don’t embrace spiritual things as good while hating what is of the earth.

By gazing into the Cave and beholding the Incarnate God, a transformation occurs in uniting ourselves to Him. All we have becomes an offering to Him in gratitude. In Christ we now become Kings of Creation and no longer slaves of Creation. In Christ we become Prophets of Creation and no longer fools of Creation. In Christ, we as Priests become intercessors of Creation and no longer desecrators of Creation. It is only through Christ we can ever realize this reality because He is the King, the Prophet, and the Priest of Creation. He once again reveals the “very good” of Creation in His Nativity.

Passions that are self-oriented now can become offerings to God the Father, through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. They are offerings in gratitude for the many gifts He has given, whether they are gifts of food, safety, security, or knowledge. Finally, a man and woman offers their desire to be united to each other, and to have that union blessed by the Church, and thus become an icon of a common witness between a husband and wife towards the Kingdom and of Christ’s love for the Church.

Our participation in the Cave is realized and renewed through our Baptism and Chrismation. It is fulfilled in the Cave of the Eucharistic Assembly where we touch earth and encounter heaven. Let us rejoice this day and be glad; for the glory of our earthly life, what we sense, feel, and touch, now points to the glory of that which is beyond what we see, feel and touch, a glory that has no ending!

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

With love in Christ, the unworthy

Paul
Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest

To be circulated or read in Diocesan parishes.