

To the Honorable Clergy, Venerable Monastics, and Pious Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

My Beloved Brethren and Blessed Children in the Lord,

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Today, as we proclaim with joyous hearts that “God is With Us,” we give glory to God for the Feast of the Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. At the same time, we are surrounded by a host of images, symbols, icons, and representations of what the world thinks this Feast is, and what it should be. From Christmas trees live and fake, to reindeer and snowmen, the world is drowning in empty images of Christmas. And even in those images that seem to follow the tradition of the Church, we find lacking a true engagement with the brokenness and emptiness around us.

In the Church, we behold “a strange, most glorious mystery” -- a child, born in a tomb-like cave, laid in the feeding trough of animals, born into this world to a people unprepared to receive His message, a people unable to accept His message. This is indeed a strange image, an image of weakness, an image of defeat, poverty and lowliness. It is an image which could easily be dismissed if it were not so wondrous in its inexplicability. It is an image that has at its core the message of the life of the world to come. It is the image of our salvation.

When faced with this image of Christ born in a tomb, we are, as the Mother of God was, faced with a choice to say: “Yes Lord enter into my members, my veins, my heart; cleanse me, purify me, adorn me.” Or, we can choose to turn away and reject the joy, health and gladness offered us through the Christ and our communion with Him. And yet, this choice is not simply an intellectual assent to some vague and nebulous idea or concept.

When we decide to turn to Christ and invite Him into our hearts, we commit to a life of action, a life in which we not only *hear*, but *act upon* the commandments of Christ and the teaching of the Holy Fathers of the Church. In speaking of the motherhood of the Theotokos, Father Georges Florovsky reminds us that the act accepting Christ into our lives is not one that is exhausted by the initial moment, “even as natural motherhood is not exhausted by the fact of physical birth. The fulfillment of motherhood lies in sacrificial love. By this love for the One born the passive self-centeredness of the heart is broken. In this love is shown the natural image of love for another person, for the neighbor.”

Our turning to the tomb-like cave of Christ’s birth, and our acceptance of Him into our lives, commits us to a life of love for our neighbor and for all mankind. Our turning to the One Who laid in a manger is our accepting of the call to minister to our fellow man, here and now. Our turning to the One Who was born of a Virgin is a proclamation of our love of Christ and of His Cross. Indeed, our turning to the God Who is now with us is a proclamation of our anticipation of the life of the world to come.

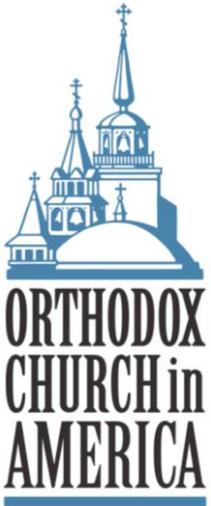
With heartfelt prayers and in the ineffable love of the Holy Christ child,

With love in the Lord,



+TIKHON

Archbishop of Washington
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