

PASTORAL LETTER 2014

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Christ is born! Let us glorify Him!

“In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; but in these last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe. He is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, sustaining all things by his mighty word.”

Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews 1:1-3

Beloved Spiritual Children in Christ,
Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics and Devout Faithful of our God-protected Episcopate:

*“May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send you grace and peace,
and from us, hierarchal blessings!”*

To us mortals, the measurement of time is important. All peoples are aware of a progression of changes in what we know as time: the setting of the sun, the rising of the sun, the change of seasons, the cycle of birth and death. We are all aware that there was a “time” when we ourselves did not exist on this earth, and a “time” when we shall no longer exist on this earth.

Saint Paul, in this letter to the Hebrews, mentions various stages of time, the understanding of which are of the utmost importance to every human: “creation of the universe,” “in times past,” “in these last days.” “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). These word references to time are like a beacon which attract our attention to God’s holy actions from his creation of the universe to “the sustaining of all things by his mighty word.” St. John the Evangelist proclaims: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1). This Word is Jesus “who came into the world to save sinners. I myself am the greatest among them” (1Tim. 1:15). From the beginning of human creation until the Second Coming of Christ “and the life of the world to come,” God speaks to us, his children, of his salvation for us.

What Saint Paul tells us is that God is ever active in his creation and that his activities include communicating with us, with you and me, with all humanity. He reminds us that God “spoke in partial ways to our ancestors”; in other words, God was/is always present in human society and this through various ways, not the least of which is he spoke/speaks to us through others, his prophets. But this communication was “partial.” God’s plan was not to be totally revealed before the fullness of time. Paul also makes it clear that there is a time “before” and a time “after.” “Time before” what and “time after” what?

The “time before” was when God spoke through his prophets, foretelling that he himself would come among us. The Prophet Isaiah names him, “Emmanuel” in Hebrew, and in translation, “God With Us” (Isaiah 7:14). Blessed Augustine reminds us: “All these very writings the Jews have” (Exposition on Psalm 56). In other words, the prophecies were spoken before the coming of Christ, before his birth among us; and he, Christ, fulfills them because the prophecies were/are about him. The prophecies are ever alive in Christ.

The prophets were men of the people, chosen to announce God’s plan for the human race, but they knew only what was revealed for them to speak. God himself speaks directly to us through his Son who is “his heir of all things,” and who “sustains all things by his mighty word.” That

is, the word which Jesus speaks sustains this world in which we live, the same word by which all things came into existence as stated in the Book of Genesis.

Jesus the Son of God is said to be the “reflection” or “refulgence” of the Father’s glory. This is the glory which Christ showed to his disciples on Mount Tabor at his transfiguration. He is the Joyous Light of the Father, as we sing in vespers. In other words, he is like the Father and is “the very imprint of his being.” The Son of God, Jesus, is “God of God, true Light of true Light, born of the Father before ages” (Creed). This identifies Jesus to be not a prophet speaking what he was blessed to speak but is himself the source of revealing God’s plan; he is the Word, the Son who “sustains all things by his mighty word.”

Although the prophets spoke as much as God revealed to them of his plan for us, God revealed himself only in the “fullness of time.” This fullness of time in human history was when God invited human cooperation with him in a unique event. This invitation was whole-heartedly accepted by the holy Virgin of Nazareth, Mary, daughter of Joachim and Anna, who freely accepted God’s invitation to bear God’s eternal Son, Jesus the Christ, in time.

The “time after” or “in these last days” is the time after the birth of Christ, the time in which we are living, “these last days” when God speaks to us directly through his Son, our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus. He no longer uses any human prophet but has come among us, “born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.” Jesus is above and beyond all prophets; Jesus is himself the fulfillment of all prophecies.

Jesus is also the Son of Man. The Son freely accepted to be born among and for humanity. The prophets, men and women, were born at a certain time in history; Jesus in his human nature was born in human time of a woman, the holy Mother of God. St. Leo the Great explains to us: “And by a new nativity, Christ was begotten, conceived by a Virgin, born of a Virgin, without paternal desire, without injury to the mother’s chastity...The origin is different but the nature like; not by intercourse with man but by the power of God was it brought about; for a Virgin conceived, a Virgin bore, and a Virgin she remained” (Sermon 22:2).

Christ ever existed eternally with the Father. St. John of Damascus teaches us: “The body which is born of the holy Virgin is in truth body united with divinity (*Orthodox Faith*, Book 3:5). This is the meaning of “in times past” and “in these later days.” Time before the birth of Christ and the time after this time, these days in which we are living. For centuries, time was measured as B.C. “Before Christ” and A.D. “After Christ,” not C.E. (Common Era) as is now the “acceptable” tag. The coming of Jesus Christ into human history remains a “before” and an “after” event, regardless of how the world chooses to identify his entrance into human history as Son of God. Jesus asks us but one thing: “But you, who do you say I am?” (Mt. 16:16). You, O Jesus are the power of the Father with whom he “created the universe”, who “sustains all things by his word.”

“Jesus is indeed, heir of all things.” St. Clement of Alexandria teaches us: “The Word, who in the beginning bestowed on us life as Creator when he formed us, taught us to live well when he appeared as our Teacher; that as God he might afterwards conduct us to the life which never ends” (*Exhortation to Heathens*, Ch. 1:7). He that created with the Father, who saved us by the cross, who sent the Comforter among us: he it is who is heir of all things, and it is he whose birth among us we celebrate today.

“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will!” The song of the angels at the birth of our savior should be on our lips and in our hearts this day!

Christ is born! Glorify him!

+ Nathaniel

+NATHANIEL, Archbishop

**By the grace of God and the will of the people,
Archbishop of Detroit and The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America**