

PASTORAL LETTER 2015

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

“Everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms, has to be fulfilled.”

Gospel of Saint Luke the Evangelist 24:44

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!”

Christ is born! Let us glorify Him!

Dearly Beloved,

Today, we are celebrating the feast of the Nativity of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ in Bethlehem in Judea, now Israel. Sometimes, we even call this his “birthday.” It was a birth unperceived by the general population of his day but known to Moses, to the Prophets and to David the ancestor of Jesus Christ, all who were anticipating the coming of the Messiah. Glory to God who fulfilled his promise to mankind! As the rest of Israel ate and drank, worked and slept, Emmanuel, God-with-us, was quietly born into the midst of the population: among the Jews, among the Romans, among the Greeks and strangers. Few, indeed, were those who heard the angelic choir glorifying God hovering over the cave in which the Messiah was born. Today, millions repeat the angelic hymns praising the birth of Emmanuel.

From childhood and through his life, our Lord Jesus Christ himself knew the Law of Moses and quoted from it; he knew and repeated the prophecies of centuries before his birth; he knew and sang the Psalms of his forefather David in the synagogues where he listened and where he taught. The people knew these scriptures, and his apostles and the crowds who witnessed his teaching and miracles knew them, too. But that the Scriptures were being fulfilled in their own day, they did not immediately perceive. That is why later, before the ascension, Christ said that “everything written about me” must be fulfilled.

The Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Hebrews echoes this when he says: *“At various times in the past and in different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, the Son that he has appointed to inherit everything and through whom he made everything that is. He is the radiant light of God’s glory and the perfect copy of his nature”* (Hebrews 1: 1-3).

God, in his love for mankind, first spoke his words through holy men and women, whom we know as Prophets. But to be absolutely clear about his love for us, in the fullness of time, he sent Jesus, his Son, whom we must entitle the unique “Word of God.” Christ speaks from and for the Father to us, not as a servant as were the prophets, but as his own true and only-begotten Son.

In the Creed, we state that we *“..believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Only-Begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages, light of true light, true God of true God...incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man.”* Saint Clement of Rome states: *“Do we not have one God and one Christ and one Spirit of Grace poured out upon us? And is there not one calling in Christ?”* (Letter to Corinthians, Ch. 46).

This personal “Word of God,” whose name is Jesus Christ, speaks the direct word of the Father to us, for Jesus is ever and always present with the Father from the beginning of everything that he brought into existence, even unto all eternity as the second person of the All Holy Trinity. *“He is the radiant light of God’s glory and the perfect copy of his nature.”*

This Holy Feast of Christians, the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus the Christ in the flesh, has firm scriptural basis, from the Law of Moses, the Prophecies and the Psalms. Thus it was that after his resurrection from the tomb, for 40 days Jesus remained with them and *“opened their minds to understand the scriptures”* (Luke 24:45). Our Lord in his last instructions to the Apostles stated: *“Everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms, has to be fulfilled.”* [Gospel of Saint Luke the Evangelist 24:44] *“He is the radiant light of God’s glory and the perfect copy of his nature.”*

Beginning with Genesis through Revelation, these Scriptures remind us of our need for a Savior, for the birth of the Savior, and for the return of the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Although we can say that our celebration is of the Nativity or Birth of Christ in the flesh of the Holy Virgin Mary in Bethlehem in Judea in human time, we know that he has existed from before all creation. He is the fulfillment of the Law, the Prophets and Psalms and of the yearning every human soul has to be in companionship with God. *“He is the radiant light of God’s glory and the perfect copy of his nature.”*

Saint John the Evangelist reminds us of this pre-existence of the Word of Life saying: *“Something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes; that we have watched and touched with our hands: the Word, who is life---is our subject. That life was made visible...which was with the Father and has been made visible to us”* (1 John 1:1-2). *“He is the radiant light of God’s glory and the perfect copy of his nature.”*

In hearing the Prophet Isaiah, we realize the great love God has for us in foretelling of the birth of the Savior, thereby giving mankind hope. He did not let us remain in darkness about his love but stated through Isaiah: *“The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light...”;* and *“For there is a child born for us, a son given to us, and dominion is laid on his shoulders; and this is the name they give him: Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace. Wide is his dominion in a peace that has no end”* (Isaiah 9: 6-7). *“He is the radiant light of God’s glory and the perfect copy of his nature.”*

This, dear Christian, means that not only can we in spirit go to Bethlehem to adore him there, but even moreso, that God has thrown open the very Gates of Paradise and invited us to enter into his presence, led there by his Son, the child born in a cave and laid in a manger. It means that what Saint John has told us earlier, that “Life that was invisible” has become visible through the womb of his Virgin Mother, our all-holy Lady, the Birthgiver of God, Mary, and was touched, heard, and seen among men. *“He is the radiant light of God’s glory and the perfect copy of his nature.”*

Let us close these thoughts with the introduction of the wonderful Nativity Kontakia of Saint Romanos the Hymnographer about the Word who is Life: *“Today the Virgin gives birth to him who is above all being; the earth offers a cave to him whom no one can approach. The Angels with shepherds glorify God and the Magi journey with a star, for a little child has been born to us, he who is God before the ages.”* Indeed, Our Lord and God and Savior is *“the radiant light of God’s glory and the perfect copy of his nature.”*

Christ is born! Let us 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
of the Orthodox Church in America