

# PASTORAL LETTER 2011



## NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Christ is born! Let us glorify Him!

*“The mystery hidden before all time and unknown even to the angels was revealed to men through you, O Birthgiver of God, that God becoming man in a non-confused union willed to accept the cross for us; thus, he resurrected Adam the first-fashioned and saved our souls from death.”*

*Theotokion, Tone 4*

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!*

In the Theotokion Hymn cited above, while first of all giving glory to God, certain matters are brought to our attention: first, that there is a divine hidden mystery to be contemplated; second that this mystery was revealed only at a specific time to humankind; third, that God himself became man and sacrificed himself for humanity; fourth, that he restores fallen Adam and all humanity to unending life; fifth, that these matters, the mystery, the sacrifice, the exaltation came about through the willingness, acceptance and participation of a woman who lived and lives in perfect harmony with God and humankind.

*“The mystery which has been hidden from eternity”* (Eph. 3:9), *“...the message which was a mystery hidden for generations and centuries and has now been revealed...”* (Col.1:26) is how the Apostle Paul describes the birth of Christ into this world. This is what he preached to Jew and Gentile. St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: *“He has let us know the mystery of his purpose, the hidden plan he so kindly made in Christ from the beginning...that he would bring everything together under Christ, as head”* (Eph. 1:9f). God has “let us know!” Beloved, we have no excuse to not respond to God, for he himself has “let us know” the scope of Christ’s birth into this world, and he expects a response from each of us. Let us glorify him!

When we greet each other saying: “Christ is born,” we are referring to the fulfillment of this divine mystery which was revealed to all humanity through the incarnation or taking-on of our human nature by God just as it was foretold in the prophets, announced by angels and attested to in the New Testament of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ and lived and witnessed to by Orthodox Christians.

The name “Christ” means “the anointed one”. He is the one begotten of God the Father to announce to all the Good News, the Gospel: that God is love and loves all humanity which he made in his own image and likeness; three persons: the All-Holy Trinity, one in Divine Nature, divine love without end. God the Father is love and loves all humanity. God the Son, the Christ, is love and loves all humanity. God the Holy Spirit is love and loves all humanity.

This great love of God is that he invites all humankind to renew itself, person by person, to the original state of Adam, the “first-fashioned,” a state from which all humankind is fallen. Now by our choice and through baptism and through his grace, we are to live in harmony with God and man in this life and thus be graced into everlasting life. This is the “salvation of our souls,” which is our personal unending existence of which the hymn speaks.

Christ “...was born of the Father before all ages; he is light of the light of the Father; he is true God of true God, begotten of the Father but not made...” through human intercourse. He is of one essence with the Father. Through Christ Jesus, all things came to be (Creed).

Jesus the Savior, Christ the Anointed one who brought the Good News, him do we glorify. It is because of his work to restore Adam to his dignity and to restore each of us to that same original beauty that Christ is glorified by all the powers of heaven and earth and by us when we respond, “Glorify him!”

St. Ephrem the Syrian reminds us: *“For the angel said, ‘You shall call his name Jesus’, ‘that is, Savior’ for he shall save his people from sins.’ This name therefore refers not to his nature but to his deeds”* (Commentary on Tatian’s Diatesarion 25). Coming among us, he willingly sacrificed himself on the cross to restore our fallen human nature to the pre-fallen existence and beautiful nature of the first Adam. Here then is Divine Love in action, a continuation of the loving act of creation and restoration and salvation, on and on into eternity and forever.

It was the realization that we had turned our back on God that the fear of Death made humankind turn inward, mistaking a distorted understanding of the true purpose of life. The true purpose is to return to God in this life through knowledge of his love and to move into the joy of unending life in the age to come. By his voluntary and willing act of sacrifice on the cross, Jesus our Lord, overcame and destroyed the power of Death, which put into humankind a fear of annihilation.

The Lord first had to take on our human nature to dwell among us. He did this through the willingness of a woman, herself of human nature, our Most Blessed Lady, the Virgin Mary. John the Monk exclaims: *“Wonder! God is come among humanity; he that cannot be contained is contained in a womb; the timeless enters time, and great mystery: his conception is without seed, his emptying past telling!”* (Stichera of the Annunciation). St. Bede says: *“Because death made its entrance through a woman, it was fitting that life return through a woman [who] produced for the world the Author of salvation”* (Homilies on the Gospels 1:3).

Jesus took on our human nature through the power of the Holy Spirit and by the acceptance of the Holy Birthgiver of God, Mary. St. Cyril of Jerusalem reminds us of what Paul the Apostle says: *“God sent his Son born of a woman”* (Gal. 4:4), not that he was born of a man and a woman [FC 61:246-47]; and thus, we confess his virgin birth and the perpetual virginity of his Mother. Returning to the hymn, we understand that it was through the Virgin Mary that Christ Jesus was born, and the divine mystery of salvation “hidden before all time” was finally revealed to humankind.

Why was this mystery not known sooner? Precisely because the revelation of the mystery could only be when the person through whom the mystery could be revealed, could be approached, and that person was the Virgin Mary. This was the “fullness of time” of which Scripture speaks; the time when this holy woman would say to the Archangel Gabriel, “Let it be to me as you said” (Luke 1:38).

This mystery, that is, that God whom no man can see, came to be seen (John 1:1) to take on our human nature in Christ Jesus, was not revealed to the angels, God’s ministers and messengers, before it would be made known to humankind. It was only the Archangel Gabriel (“Strength of God”) who came with God’s invitation to the maiden in Nazareth, that the hidden mystery became announced. St. Leo the Great explains: *“Before the Redeemer was born in the flesh, there was discord between us and the angels, from whose brightness and holy perfection we were separated...but since we now acknowledge our King [Jesus], the angels receive us as fellow citizens...now they are at peace with us...now they honor us as friends”* (Homilies on the Gospels 8:2).

Let us draw to a close this reflection on the present feast of the Birth of Our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ by listening attentively to the words of Paul to the Church in Ephesus, that sum up those matters on which we have been contemplating: *“Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ. Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence, determining that we should become his adopted sons, through Jesus Christ for his own kind purposes, to make us praise the glory of his grace, his free gift to us in the Beloved, in whom, through his blood, we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins. ...Now you too, in him, have heard the message of the truth and the good news of your salvation, and have believed it”* (Ephesians 1:3-7,13).

God chose us from all eternity, and in time revealed his divine mystery to us. He now calls us to live in love in this world that he has created and sustains. He wants our praise for his love and grace which lifts us up again. He has bestowed on us forgiveness of our sins. He has invited us to be with Christ under whom will be all things in the age to come.

He asks that we live what we believe, and thus give glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Christ is born! Glory Him!  
The Messiah is among us! Let us go forth and receive Him!**

**+ NATHANIEL  
By the mercy of God, Archbishop of Detroit  
and The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America**