

NATIVITY EPISTLE



of

His Grace

JOHN

Bishop of Naro-Fominsk

Administrator of the Patriarchal Parishes in the USA

Nativity Epistle of the Administrator of the Patriarchal Parishes in the USA, His Grace Bishop John of Narofominsk to the Pastors, Monastics and All the Faithful Children of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USA

The Venerable Fathers, all-Honorable monks and nuns, dear brothers and sisters!

On this saving night when the great mystery of the incarnation; when the Eternal God became Man; when the ancient curse which caused the fall of Adam, ceased to exist; when the world received hope to return to their creator - I heartily congratulate you with bright feast of the Nativity of Christ!

The great preacher of the Fourth Century Saint John Chrysostom, expounding on the Feast of the Nativity of Christ said, "Who would call this feast the mother of all feasts ... this Feast is the beginning and foundation of its Epiphany, Holy Pascha, Ascension and Pentecost. If Christ was not born of the flesh; he would not have been baptized on the feast of His Holy Epiphany; he would not have suffered for us on the Feast of His Holy Resurrection and would not have sent the Holy Spirit, on Holy Pentecost. So, from the feast of the Nativity of Christ began the feasts we commemorate, as the source of different streams".

This momentous event for all mankind took place more than two thousand years ago in the ancient city of Bethlehem, "the city of bread" as it was referred to in ancient Israel. And as Christ later made reference to himself while preaching saying, "I am the bread of life which came down from heaven: he who eats of this bread shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world ". (John 6: 51).

The Church continues to keep the traditions of the times of Christ in its church service, just as described in the Holy Gospel what occurred in the quiet night under the entrance of the manger. The Mother of God took in her sacred hands the newborn Savior in silence and there is little known about the greatest event in the history of mankind. But when people are silent, the heavens are opened, and the creation itself praises the Creator. Angels, seeing a great miracle cannot hide their joy and proclaim to the shepherds saying: "Flock, flock! Halt the playing of trumpets and announce with a great joy that Christ was born in Bethlehem of the Lord's good pleasure to save the human race. Praise Him, blessed fathers ... this is the sign. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. "The sky over Bethlehem is brightly lit up. In the cosmos all the countless angelic hosts and from on high were heard divinely singing praises to God: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

"What does it mean the song of angels? Without a doubt, give thanks to the high ranks and rejoice that we, who live on the Earth, have much good done to us. As is written: "thank God who is on Earth, for there is now peace". Before, human nature was at ends with God, and is now reconciled, through the incarnation of our Savior. So, you see the world of God and man? The Son of God Himself is the world. Thus, it is the same world, in which the Son of God came to earth. And "*good will toward men,*" so interpreted the Gospel narrative by Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria.

But what it means for a person to find peace? Surely the words of Christ who came to the world is merely an allegory or a promise of something to happen in the future. After all, today we see human grief, illness, separation, strife and war. People are still looking for calm and peace, seeking salvation and grace...

In the Holy Gospel the Christ himself responds to this: "and when you come into a house, salute it, and if the house be worthy let your peace come upon it, but if it not be worthy, let your peace return to you"(Matthew 13 10:12). "*Peace*"- in Aramaic; "*Shalom* "or" *Salem*" in Arabic means the greatest good, the fullness of the divine gifts (material and spiritual). Wishing for "*peace*" is the prayer for the Divine Blessing, as we in the Orthodox Church in every service we hear the greeting the priest: "Peace be unto all!" Exchanges of these greetings are purely of an eastern nature. It is known that even today in the traditional East, if people will pronounce blessings upon meeting another person, and then learns that this person irreverent, he will go and take their blessings back. Thus, if in His house and people accept the teachings of Christ people will attain the blessings of God. Otherwise, "*your peace will return to you*", that is as a blessing is withdrawn; God will deprive a house of His blessings.

So today, as we praise the newborn Savior, "open your heart to the world", which brought us to Christ's incarnation, accept Jesus Christ as he revealed to people peace and salvation, as grace of the Creator to His creation; do not turn away the grace and joy, of the Angels on Earth!

"Christ is Born, Glorify Him! Christ comes from heaven-rejoice! Christ is on Earth-be exalted! "

+ JOHN

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