23/12/2021

Reflection for Christmas 2021



Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

For the last few weeks, the Church has invited us to “travel” to Bethlehem to meet the newborn King, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our travels, of course, are spiritual. Since November 15, we have been encouraged to observe a fast. Since November 21, the hymns of the Nativity have steadily entered our services. At home we have also begun to prepare, through decoration, baking and cooking, obtaining gifts, and making donations to charitable and philanthropic causes. Day-by-day, one step at a time, we draw closer to the Feast itself.

The culmination of our journey to the Feast is the Divine Liturgy on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, where we shall encounter Christ in the fullest. Together, we hear the story of the birth of Christ from the Gospel. We hear the hymns that begin, “Today…”, reminding us that we are present at the cave in Bethlehem, gazing on the manger where the newborn Christ rests. Even the Christmas carols we sing place us at the events. When we receive Holy Communion, we receive Christ Himself.

In the Vespers for Christmas, the mystery of the Nativity is presented to us very

simply, yet quite profoundly. A hymn states, “For what He was, He has remained, true God: and what He was not, He has taken upon Himself, becoming man through love for mankind.” The Jesus we encounter in the manger is the theanthropos, the God-man. Jesus is fully God, “true God of true God, of one essence with the Father,” and fully human, like us in all things except sin. This is a mystery beyond our comprehension.

In the opening chapter of the Gospel of John we read, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” (John 1:14) The question that we wrestle with is “why did God do this?” The hymn answers the question: His “love for mankind.” God’s act of love becomes a supreme example for us, since God loves us so deeply, should not we strive to love so deeply as well?

Our response to God’s love is to become more loving of one another. This is the sign of the kingdom of God: to love as God loves. As Saint John wrote in his universal epistle, “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” (1 John 4:8-9).

One does not need to spend much time looking at our world today to recognize that we have fallen away from God’s command to love one another. There are still many conflicts in the world. It seems we can barely talk to those with different ideas than ours. Instead, they become enemies. Some believe that they can make others happy by forcing their way on others. But suffice it to say that this is not the world as God intended for us. Each of us must accept responsibility, no matter how small it may seem, for our present age because we are the makers of the age, not some anonymous, “they.” When we acknowledge this reality, we must repent, that is, we must change our minds — and our actions – and begin to think with the mind of our loving God and to act as our loving God acts, so that we may become more loving people.

My beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, the Nativity of Christ, the birth of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, provides us with the opportunity to commit ourselves to becoming more loving men and women. As we leave our parishes on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, carry the warmth and joy from your encounter with the new-born Christ, from your spiritual journey to Bethlehem out into the world. The joy of this Feast, as we celebrate it in our parishes and in our society, invites to live all the days filled with warmth, joy, and care for one another.

As the angels sang to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth,

peace, good will among men.” (Luke 2:14) Our words matter: make them words of love, joy, and hope. Our actions matter: become more charitable and philanthropic, serve the less fortunate, sharing our material goods while radiating the glad tidings of the season. Share the good news that “God is with us!”

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, as you celebrate this Feast day with family and friends, I pray that those who are named for this Feast and celebrate their name days today, will always be blessed by God.

Merry Christmas! Καλά Χριστούγεννα!

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

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