



HOLY TRINITY ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



723 N BODINE ST PHILADELPHIA, PA 19123

CHURCH BULLETIN

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Nativity of Our Lord

Gospel Reading **Matthew 2: 1 - 12**

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'" Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time

the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Apostle Reading **Galatians 4: 4 - 7**

Brethren, when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are

sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir of God through Christ.

At this glorious, illuminated Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the ministers of the Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Church in Philadelphia, Father Nicolai Buga, Father Timotei Avram and Father Deacon Petru Bogdan Manea, humbly pray to our Lord Jesus Christ to bless you all, parishioners, supporters and worshipers of our church alike, and wish you to celebrate the Holy Feast-days of the Nativity, the New Year 2021 and Epiphany in peace, joy and good spirits. May God protect you for many happy years!

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MERRY CHRISTMAS



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PASTORAL LETTER ON THE FEAST OF THE LORD'S NATIVITY 2020

† NICOLAE

by the mercies of God
Archbishop of the Ro-
manian Orthodox
Archdiocese
of the USA and
Metropolitan of the
Romanian Orthodox
Church
of the Americas

To our beloved
Clergy and faithful
Orthodox Christians,
peace and joy from
Christ the Lord, and
from us a hierarchical
blessing.



this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: **'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,'** which is translated, **'God with us'**" (Matthew 1:18-23). This is the reassurance of the Righteous Joseph by the angel of the Lord, that what has

"All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: *'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,'* which is translated, *'God with us'*" (Matthew 1:22-23).

Very Reverend Fathers, Beloved Faithful,

At this glorious feast I too proclaim to you with the angel that God is with us, that God has not forsaken us, that **God has not forgotten His creation and does not ignore its suffering, that God sends us a Savior.** The incarnation of the Son of God from the Virgin Mary is the source of the Christian's hope in the providence of God for every moment of his earthly life as preparation for eternal life.

This proclamation is contained in the presentation of the event of the Lord's Nativity by St. Matthew the Evangelist: *"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' So all*

happened with the Virgin Mary is the result of God's action for the salvation of humankind. At the same time it is the proclamation of the Incarnate Son through the name *Jesus* and the revelation of God's plan for humanity through the name *Immanuel*.

St. John Chrysostom explains this relationship between the names in St. Matthew's text: "I could have asked, 'Why then was He not called Immanuel, but Jesus Christ? The angel did not say *You will call*, but *they will call*, that is, the multitudes of people and the deeds accomplished by Christ. In this text, the name Immanuel is given by the deeds done by Christ... Therefore, the words *They will call Him Immanuel* mean nothing other than that they will see that God is with mankind. **God has always been with mankind, but never so clearly as now.**" (1) And St. Nikolai Velimirovich reinforces this explanation: "Both of the names speak of the depths of the purpose for which Christ came into the world and His ministry in it. **He comes to forgive, to have mercy on people, to save them from their sins, and therefore He will be called Savior, Jesus.** *Who can forgive sins except God alone?* ...No one knows the entire horror of sin except God Who is without sin. And no one can enter into the heart of the world in order to pull out the snake (of sin) and expel it except God alone." (2) These two fathers interpret the proclamation to Joseph and the two names given to the baby as **the revelation of God's descent to earth to deliver mankind from sin and the assurance of God's care for us.**

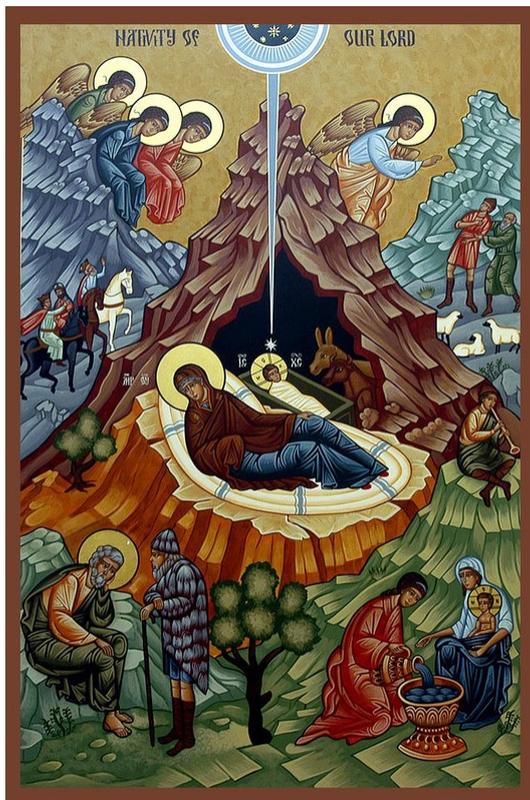
This proclamation is not one of past history, nor is it a pious remembrance of the birth of a wise man, but **the proclamation of the presentness of the Nativity of Christ**. On Christmas morning at Matins we joyously proclaim, “*Christ is born, glorify Him! Christ is come from heaven, go and meet Him! Christ is on earth, arise to Him!*” Together with the angels, the shepherds, and the magi, we are witnesses of the Incarnation of the Word, we are witnesses of the good news that God has not forgotten us and He has sent us a Savior. **Christ is born in the soul of each of us, granting us that which is most precious on earth: faith and hope in the power of His redemption.**

This birth makes a claim on us **now**, it requires us to *rise up and go and meet the Christ* who is from the heavens. Our salvation in Christ is not a passive process, but an active one, with participation, dedication, sacrifice. Salvation is the gift of Christ, but it is accomplished *through Christ*. “*Christ is the fulfillment of the true nature of man—the crown of creation—because in Him man is fully united with God,*” (3) says Father Dumitru Stăniloae. **Christ is the endpoint of our being raised up, but He is also the way and our help towards this endpoint:** “*In Christ the way has been opened for us toward the endpoint of full humanization and He is the way toward this, for He is the path toward communion with God as a community of persons... Through His Incarnation as man, Christ has made communion with Himself as God (or rather, with the entire Holy Trinity) accessible in the highest human form. Only Jesus Christ has given us the power to fully leave behind us the egoism of sin, the prison of the limits of (human) nature, and of the corruptibility which concludes in death.*” (4)

The fulfillment of salvation *in Christ* and *through Christ* is also revealed to us by Father Stăniloae in words that are profound and full of hope: “*Man becomes through Jesus Christ the son of God and the brother of Jesus Christ-God. This is the highest dignity and state to which he is raised. But what else does this mean if not being raised up to the most intimate ‘I-Thou’ communion with God? He who remains in communion with God is eternal, for God cannot allow the one He loves so much that he receives him in communion with Himself, to perish...*” (5).

Beloved faithful,

For many months the entire world has been overtaken by the fear of sickness and of death, by grave questions regarding the future of each one of us, of the family, of the community, and of the world. The Christian can find the answer to these questions witnessing the faith in the Incarnation of the Son of God for our salvation, and looking to Christ as the endpoint of our living. If we want to find answers that bring peace, we must turn to Christ, we must put our hope in Him, for He is the unchanging guidepost of our existence, He is the same “*yesterday and today and forever*” (Hebrews 13:8). St. Sophrony Sakharov, our contemporary, familiar with the problems of our world, assures us that only in Christ will we find answers: “**Jesus Christ is the measure of all things divine and human... In Him we find the answer to all our problems, which without Him would be impossible to resolve. He is truly the mystical axis of the universe.**” (6)



With this exhortation, I pray that the One born in a manger will grant you **health and increase in faith, steadfast hope, and spiritual peace, for He is our Savior!** With a brotherly embrace in Christ the Lord, I wish you *Joyous Holidays and Many Years!*

Your brother in prayer to God,
desirous of every heavenly good,

† **NICOLAE**

Chicago, The Feast of the Lord's Nativity, 2020

Notes:

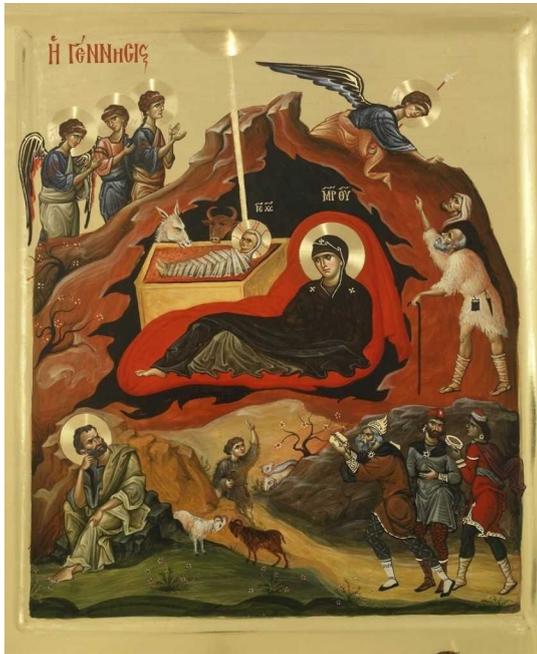
- (1) Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia la Matei*, Omilia V, PSB 23, București, 1994, p. 68.
- (2) Sf. Nicolae Velimirovici, *Predici*, Editura Ileana, București, p. 24.
- (3) Preot Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 2, București, 1997, p. 23.
- (4) Ibid, p. 22.
- (5) D. Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, Craiova, 1993, p. 90.
- (6) Arhim. Sofronie Saharov, *Rugăciunea – experiența vieții veșnice*, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 2007, p. 39.

The Mystery of the Incarnation Demands Our Joy

Let us be glad in the Lord, dearly-beloved, and rejoice with spiritual joy that there has dawned for us the day of every-new redemption, of ancient preparation, of eternal bliss. For as the year rolls round, there recurs for us the commemoration of our salvation, which promised from the beginning, accomplished in the fullness of time will endure for ever; on which we are bound with hearts up-lifted to adore the divine mystery: so that what is the effect of God's great gift may be celebrated by the Church's great rejoicing. For God the almighty and merciful, Whose nature is goodness, Whose will is power, Whose work is mercy: as soon as the devil's malignity killed us by the poison of his hatred, foretold at the very beginning of the world the remedy His piety had prepared for the restoration of us mortals: proclaiming to the serpent that the Seed of the woman should come to crush the lifting of his baneful head by its power, signifying no doubt that Christ would come in the flesh, God and man, Who born of a Virgin should by His incorrupt birth condemn the despoiler of the human stock. Thus in the whole and perfect nature of true man was true God born, complete in what was His own, complete in what was ours. And "ours" we call what the Creator formed in us from the beginning and what He undertook to repair. For what the deceiver brought in and the deceived admitted has no trace in the Saviour. Nor because He partook of man's weaknesses, did He therefore share our faults. He took the form of a slave without stain of sin, increasing the human and not diminishing the Divine: because the "emptying of Himself" whereby the Invisible made Himself visible and Creator and Lord of all things as He was, wished to be mortal.

Therefore, when the time came, dearly beloved, which had been fore-ordained for men's redemption, the Son of God enters these lower parts of the world, descending from His heavenly throne and yet not quitting His Father's glory, begotten in a new order, by a new nativity. In a new order, because being invisible in His own nature He became visible in ours, and He whom nothing could contain, was content to be contained: abiding before all

time He began to be in time: the Lord of all things, He obscured His immeasurable majesty and took on Him the form of a servant: being God, that cannot suffer, He did not disdain to be man that can, and immortal as He is, to subject Himself to the laws of death. And by a new nativity He was begotten, conceived by a Virgin, born of a Virgin, without paternal desire, without injury to the mother's chastity: because such a birth as knew no taint of human flesh, became One who was to be the Saviour of men, while it possessed in itself the nature of human substance. For when God was born in the flesh, God Himself was the Father, as the archangel witnessed to the Blessed Virgin Mary: "because the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee: and therefore, that which shall be born of thee shall be called holy, the Son of God." The origin is different but



the nature like: not with man but by the power of God was it brought about: for a Virgin conceived, a Virgin bare, and a Virgin she remained.

Consider here not the condition of her that bare but the will of Him that was born; for He was born Man as He willed and was able. If you inquire into the truth of His nature, you must acknowledge the matter to be human; if you search for the mode of His birth, you must confess the power to be of God. For the Lord Jesus Christ came to do away with not to endure our pollutions: not to succumb to our faults but to heal them. He came that He might cure every weakness of our corruptness and all the sores of our defiled souls: for which reason it behaved Him to be born by a new order, who brought to men's bodies the new gift of unsullied purity. For the incorrupt nature of Him that was born had to guard the primal virginity of the

Mother, and the infused power of the Divine Spirit had to preserve in spotlessness and holiness that sanctuary which He had chosen for Himself: that Spirit (I say) who had determined to raise the fallen, to restore the broken, and by overcoming the allurements of the flesh to bestow

on us in abundant measure the power of chastity; in order that the virginity which in others cannot be retained in child-bearing, might be attained by them at their second birth.

Justice required that Satan be vanquished by God made man. And, dearly beloved, this very fact that Christ chose to be born of a Virgin does it not appear to be part of the deepest design? For though the true mercy of God had infinitely many schemes to hand for the restoration of mankind, it chose that particular design which put in force for the destroying of the devil's work, not the efficacy of might but the dictates of justice. For the pride of the ancient foe not undeservedly made good its despotic rights over all men, and tyrannised over those who had been of their own accord lured away from God's commands to be the slaves of his will. And to this end, without male seed Christ was conceived of a Virgin, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And whereas in all mothers conception does not take place without stain of sin, this one received purification from the Source of her conception. Her unsullied virginity knew no lust when it ministered the substance. The Lord took from His mother our nature, not our fault.

Then, therefore, the merciful and almighty Saviour so arranged the commencement of His human course as to hide the power of His Godhead, the crafty foe was taken off his guard and he thought that the nativity of the Child, Who was born for the salvation of mankind, was as much subject to himself as all others are to their birth. For he saw Him crying and weeping, he saw Him wrapped in swaddling clothes, subjected to circumcision, offering the sacrifice which the law required. Meanwhile, he inflicted insults, poured upon Him all the force of his fury. The unscrupulous thief persisted in assaulting Him, and went beyond the bond, and required the punishment of iniquity from Him in Whom he found no fault. The strong one is bound by his own chains, and every device of the evil one recoils in his own head. When the prince of the world is bound, all that he held in captivity is released. Our nature cleansed from its old contagion regains its honourable estate, death is destroyed by death, nativity is restored by nativity: since at the one and the same time redemption does away with slavery, regeneration changes our origin, and faith justifies the sinner.

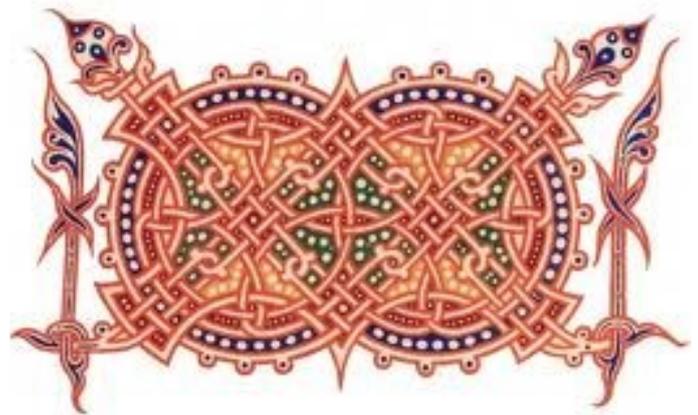
Having therefore so confident a hope, dearly beloved, abide firm in the Faith in which you are built: lest that same temper whose tyranny over you Christ has already destroyed, win you back again with any of his wiles, and mar even the joys of the present festival by his deceitful art. Such men's hearts are wrapped in total

darkness, and have no growing perception of the true Light; for they are still drawn away by the foolish errors, because they cannot lift the eyes of their mind above that which their carnal sight beholds. Let not Christian souls entertain any such wicked superstition and portentous lie. That power then, that wisdom, that majesty is to be adored which created the universe out of nothing, and framed by His almighty methods the substance of the earth and sky into what forms and dimensions He willed. Sun, moon, and stars may be most useful to us, most fair to look upon; but only if we render thanks to their Maker for them and worship God who made them, not the creation which does Him service. Then praise God, dearly beloved, in all His works and judgments. Cherish an undoubting belief in the Virgin's pure conception. Honour the sacred and Divine Mystery of man's restoration with holy and sincere service. Embrace Christ born in our flesh, that you may deserve to see Him also as the God of glory reigning in His majesty, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit remains in the unity of the Godhead for ever and ever. Amen.

Saint Leo the Great

(Sermon 22.)

Source: <http://www.orthodoxchristian.info/>)



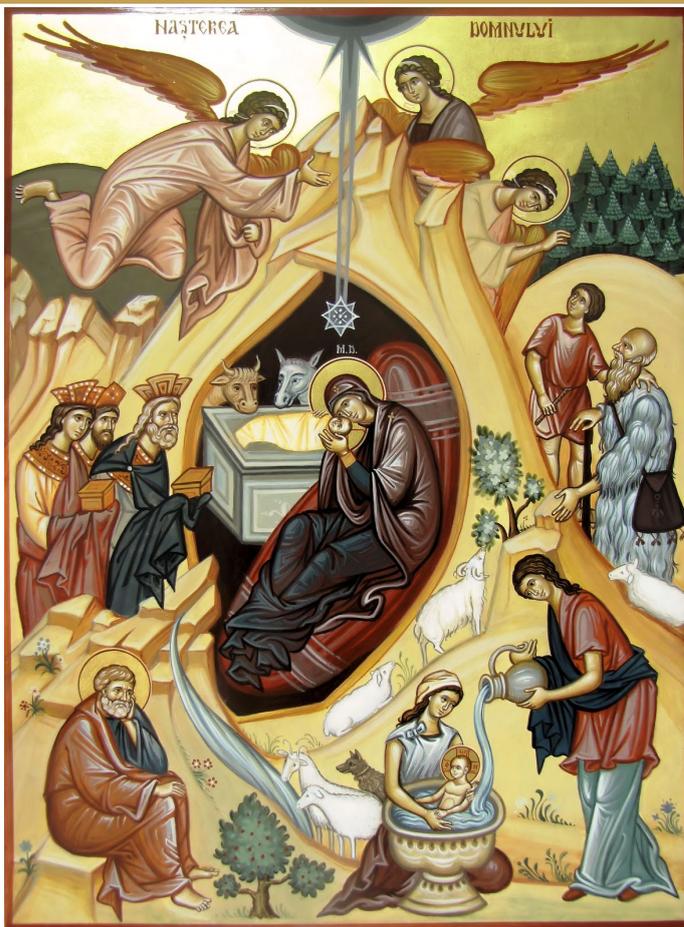
When the Fullness of Time Had Come

The Epistle Lesson for the Christmas day Divine Liturgy is taken from the St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 4:4-7. In Galatians, St. Paul takes up directly the question of the Lord's Incarnation; he gives us a full theological understanding of the Incarnation of God's Son: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, of God through Christ." (Gal 4:4-7)

One could say that in these four verses St. Paul captures the depth of Christ's Incarnation. In the Gospel accounts found in Luke and Matthew we find the story of Jesus' birth with which most of us are familiar, but it is St. Paul who begins to explain the significance of this event to us in ways that help us understand God's purpose. Almost every word or phrase in these verses is replete with meaning, so let us take a moment to understand his point.

St. Paul uses the phrase the "fullness of time" twice; here, and in Ephesians. It is a wonderful phrase encompassing the expectations of both the Jewish nation and the pagan world. For those who remember the rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar," there was a line complaining about why God had chosen to come in a time where there was no mass communication, rather than in our own time. While a point well taken, it misses the essence. We see how today's mass communication twists reality such that the true hero rarely makes it onto the front page, while the pop celebrity is lionized — until, of course, they fall.

The "fullness of time" is that opportune moment when everything that could be said, has been said. People are ready,



waiting and listening. In the first century the expectation for a 'savior' hung heavily in the air. Many of the words we now use to describe Jesus were used to describe the Roman emperor or other Messiahs. It was not only the Children of Israel who were waiting for the Messiah, everyone was. In the services preceding the Lord's Nativity we read from dozens of Old Testament prophecies pointing to His coming. People were on edge, and ready: the fullness of time.

"God sent his Son." The word 'sent' (ἐξαπέστειλεν) is a form of the word 'apostle.' This word developed a special meaning in the early Church, namely: to send someone in the service of God's kingdom. Implicit

in the phrase is that God's Son existed before His birth by Mary. God is sending the pre-existing Word on a mission.

"Born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law." We can easily understand "born of a woman;" God's Son is born of Mary. What requires more explanation is "born under the law, in order to redeem those ... under the law." God chose the Jewish nation to be the people through which He would make Himself and His purpose known. His "contract" (i.e., "Covenant") with them was in the form of a series of rules and regulations by which they were to live: the Law. Living by the Law made the Jews different from all other peoples on earth. To be "born under the Law" meant and means that when born a Jew, your sole purpose in life is to fulfill God's Law. No one except Jesus has ever been able to fulfill the Law. So, not only was He born under the Law. His mission was and is to redeem His people by *fulfilling* the Law.

"So that we might receive adoption as children." God's entire

objective, His sole purpose — what we describe as His “economy” — is to make us children. This access to the Father is not through biological means; it is by adoption. God’s Son becomes one of us so that we can share in what He is. St. Athanasius’ famous phrase: “God became human so that humans could become God” is another way of saying the same thing. Another Patristic saying phrases it this way: we are given the possibility to become, by choice, what God is by nature. By choosing to follow Christ — to be one with Him in Baptism and the Eucharist — we have Jesus as our brother and God as our Father.

“And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” The Holy Spirit continually and eternally “proceeds” from the Father to rest on the Son. When we become children through Christ, this same Spirit is poured out on us. It is this Spirit who guides us in our prayer, even when we don’t know what to pray for ourselves (cf. Romans 8:26). The Holy Spirit searches our hearts.

“So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.” Not many of us know what it is like to be a slave (although people are still slaves even in our own time!), but we all know what it is like to feel trapped, without choices or freedom to really choose. God makes us His heir and truly free. Christ is born to free us from all kinds of bondage.

Brothers and sisters, free yourselves from bondage to the passing things of this world. God has made us free in the birth of that Child humbly born in a cave. Cut away the noise and distractions of the world. Let us not simply put Christ back into Christmas, but rather, put our Christmas celebration back into Christ. Let us be firm in the hope of the promise given us, putting all our faith in Christ our Lord. While we may be terrified to put our lives in God’s hands, remember, He put His life in our hands, through Mary, His mother, and Joseph, His step-father. When we want to understand God’s love for us, meditate on this: the universe’s creator allows himself to be nurtured and raised by a teenage mother and a working-class father, in a “back-water” village in Galilee.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Fr. Nicholas Apostola



HOLY TRINITY’S Liturgical Schedule from December 25, 2020 to January 7, 2021

Friday December 25, 2020 - Nativity of Our Lord:

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Divine Liturgy
12:00 pm - HERE COMES SANTA!
1:00 pm - Christmas Brotherly Meal

Saturday December 26 - Synaxis of the Holy Theotokos (Second Day of Christmas):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Divine Liturgy
12:00 pm - Coffee hour

Sunday December 27, 2020 - St. Stephen’s Day:

9:30 am - Matins
10:30 am - Divine Liturgy
12:00 pm - Coffee hour

Friday January 1, 2021 - New Year’s Day. Circumcision of Our Lord, St. Basil the Great:

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Divine Liturgy
11:30 pm - Te Deum (Thanksgiving Prayer)
12:00 pm - Coffee hour

Sunday January 3, 2021 (Sunday before the Holy Theophany):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Divine Liturgy
12:00 pm - Coffee hour

Tuesday January 5, 2021 - Theophany Eve (fasting day)

Wednesday January 6, 2021 - Holy Theophany:

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Divine Liturgy
12:00 pm - Great Blessing of the Waters
1:00 pm - Coffee hour

Thursday January 7, 2021- Holy Theophany. Synaxis of St. John the Baptist (Sunday after the Holy Theophany):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Divine Liturgy
12:00 pm - Coffee hour