

ARCHPASTORAL LETTER 2024



NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Beloved Spiritual Children in Christ,
Reverend Clergy, Devout Faithful and Venerable Monastics of our God-protected Episcopate:

May God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
grant you grace and peace, and from us, hierarchal blessings!

“...in our own time, the last days, [God the Father] has spoken to us through His Son, the Son that He has appointed to inherit everything and through whom He made everything there is” (Saint Paul to the Hebrews 1:2).

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

In Genesis, we learn that ***“God created man in the image of Himself:”*** and ***“God said: ‘Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves.’”*** God is speaking in the plural. Thus, man was created by the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In May of 2025, we will celebrate the 1,700th Anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council which was held in Nicaea. Then the Church clarified and decreed that Jesus the Word, the Logos, Son of God, is uncreated, ever-existent, and fully divine. He is the Creator - not created. He is begotten—“born” or generated—from the Father, not made or created by Him. Jesus Christ is of one essence with the Father. He is true God of true God, the Word of God by Whom all things were made. You and I, Orthodox Christians, for 1700 years state and confess this in the Creed we recite in every Divine Liturgy.

Today, celebrating the Nativity of Jesus our Lord, we are present at His birth in the flesh. The Logos, the Word and Son of God was conceived in the womb of His virgin Mother Mary nine months prior. Then the Archangel Gabriel brought to the holy Virgin Mary the unique invitation to materially bear in her womb, Him who was the Chosen one, the Redeemer of humankind, the one ***“...through whom He made everything there is”*** and who will ***“inherit everything.”***

This is why we rejoiced in the conception of Jesus into His human presence in this world, and today, His birth in the flesh out of Mary’s womb to be numbered among in the census of the people of Israel. Christ came to bring us Good News, the Gospel, to speak to us, not as one of the prophets who foretold of His own coming among us, but as the fulfillment of the prophecies, He who will ***“inherit everything,”*** everything meaning us who are His by creation, His inheritance.

Saint John the Evangelist reminds us that: ***“He [the Son, Jesus our Lord] was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through Him”*** (John 1:2-3). Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the Hebrews that: ***“...in our own time, the last days, [God the Father] has spoken to us through His Son, the Son that He has appointed to inherit everything and through whom He made everything there is”*** (Heb. 1:2).

But why DID God the Father, in *“these last days,”* give His only-begotten Son to take on our human nature, our flesh, which He Himself had created? Saint Leo, Pope of Rome, enlightens us: *“Since the Son of man came that He might destroy the works of the devil, and has so joined Himself to us and us to Him, that the descent of God to what was human, has brought about the raising of man to what is divine”* (Sermon 7 For the Nativity). Jesus came to re-claim what was His, mankind’s fallen humanity; he came to save us, you and me.

This is the WHY Jesus came; to raise humankind back to its original state of its creation, to *“what is divine!”* Saint Leo then guides us with these words: *“Christians must remain ever watchful, so that they fall not into the snares of the devil, and become again entangled in errors they have renounced”* (Sermon 7 For the Nativity).

God sent His Divine Son to us to save what He had created as good, created in His own image, to release us from the stranglehold of death and eternal non-being. The Man-loving God, Jesus, who is equal to the Father and the Spirit, *“...from compassion becomes one with our nature”* (2nd Stichera of Vespers of the Prefeast). Because He has saved us, we are His inheritance from the Father. He came to save the lost sheep, you and me, us.

Thus, our humanity lies down with the babe in the manger; we cry out to that same Father as He an infant cries out to His Father, as He is enrolled in the census of Caesar, so we are enrolled in the census of eternal life; as He is cradled in the safe arms of His virgin Mother, so we too are under her protecting veil, praying for her intercession as we each live our own daily lives. The gift of life to each of us is blessed from the manger in Bethlehem; the gift of eternal life is bestowed on us by Him, who is the fulfillment of the prophecies. Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to renewed humanity raised to divinity by our compassionate, saving Lord.

Let us rejoice in hearing the golden words from our father, Saint John Chrysostom, in his homily of this day. *“I behold a new and wonderful mystery. My ears resound to the shepherd’s song, piping no soft melody but chanting full voice a heavenly hymn. The Archangels blend their voice in harmony. The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The Seraphim exalt His glory. All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the God-head here on earth and man in heaven. He Who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised...”* up to heaven (Homily 1, PG 56, col. 385).

Today, we are raised to heaven and are the inheritance of Christ the Savior who was born today!

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

**+ NATHANIEL
Archbishop of Detroit and The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America
Orthodox Church in America**