

ARCHPASTORAL LETTER 2023
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**NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR
JESUS CHRIST**

Christ is born! Let us glorify Him!

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!

“...the angel Gabriel was sent...to a virgin...and the virgin’s name was Mary. [Gabriel said] ‘Listen...you are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and called the Son of the Most High. The Holy Spirit will come upon you...’.” (Luke 1:26-30)
“Today, in the town of David, a savior has been born...He is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11)

Dearly Beloved,

Today, we are celebrating the birth in the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, “God-With-Us.” On March 25th, we celebrated His incarnation, His conception, the date on which we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon our Lady, Mary, Birthgiver of God, nine months prior to His birth in the flesh in the town of Bethlehem in Judea.

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, you and I are witnessing to an unbelieving world God’s unfailing and limitless love, His infinite mercy for all mankind. Our celebration is not of some past event but of an ongoing saving action of God for us, His children. It is ongoing through generations to come until Christ, the Chosen One whose birth we are celebrating today and every day and hour, returns to “*judge the living and the dead.*”

We have just heard, as past generations have, and as will generations to come, the words the angel Gabriel proclaimed to our Lady, Mary, the Mother of God. These words are from the heart of the Almighty God, for He sent His messenger, Gabriel, to announce the coming into the world of His Son Jesus, His Word. Jesus has come to tell us the plan of His Father and our Father, His God, and our God. The plan is to “*forgive us our transgressions as we forgive others*” and bestow on us eternal life “*in the resurrection of the Dead and the life of the age to come.*” Mankind is His offspring, His children whom He loves without limit and for whom He sent us His Son.

The Prophet Isaiah, seven centuries before the birth of Christ, proclaimed this saving future presence of the Savior on earth: “*The Lord Himself, therefore, will give you a sign. It is this: the virgin maiden is with child, and shall soon give birth to a son, who she shall call Emmanuel*” [God-With-Us] (Is. 7:14-15).

Saint Cyprian reminds us that Jesus is our only Savior, “*Although Christ’s every act right from the outset of His coming is marked by an accompanying patience, for from the first moment of His descent from the sublimity of heaven to earthly things, He did not disdain, though the Son of God, to put on man’s flesh; and although He Himself was not a sinner, to bear the sins of others*” (The Good of Patience, Ch. 6).

Perhaps, just perhaps, unthinking, we celebrate the birth of Christ as an event of the past, as that of any historical figure. In our day, we are surrounded by tinsel and lights and concerns about gifts and family gatherings. Saint Paul exhorts us: “*Therefore, we must turn our minds more attentively than before to what we have been taught, so that we do not drift away*” (Heb. 2:1-3).

Saint Leo, Pope of Rome, also reminds us and sets us right by his words: “*...yet His flesh was not of another nature to ours; nor was the soul breathed into Him from another source to that of all other men, and it excelled others not in difference in kind but in superiority of power...He would not be the mediator between God and man unless God and man had coexisted in both natures, forming one true Person*” (Letters, No. 35-3). Thus, we know that Jesus Christ loved us because he was born of a mother and lived among us, understanding the temptations we all face.

Finally, in the holy services of our Orthodox Faith, we sing: “*Through the Mother of God: by her, the all-perfect God has become a babe, being born without breaking her virginity’s seal. By means of His swaddling clothes, He has loosed the chains of our sins. By His birth as a child, He has healed the pains and sorrows of Eve. Wherefore, let the whole creation exchange glad tidings and rejoice, for Christ has come to renew it and to save our souls.*” (Great Compline, Dec 25, “Glory” of the Aposticha)

Therefore, Dearly Beloved, “*let us lift up our hearts unto the Lord and give thanks to Him...for His mercy is without end!*”

Christ is born!

Let us run to the stable of our hearts and encounter Him, Emmanuel, God-With-Us!

With paternal love and prayers, blessings and good wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Nathaniel". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

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