

Nativity of our Lord 2021

To the Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,
My Beloved Children in the Lord,

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

I greet you all today on this Great Feast of our illumination. At the Vesperal Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great for this Feast we sing:

When the Lord Jesus was born of the holy virgin, the whole universe was filled with light. The shepherds watched in the fields. The wise men worshiped and the angels sang. But Herod was troubled, for God had appeared in the flesh. He is the Savior of our souls! (Third Sticheron at "Lord, I Call")



The Lord's entry into the world invites us all to pursue this spiritual illumination, which is Christ, the Wisdom of God Himself. In the Gospel we read of the shepherds

who leave their pastures to find the Infant Christ. Likewise, Magi, the wise men from the East, traveled in pursuit of true Wisdom, which they found lying in a manger. They came at great cost and with great effort to worship Christ and offer their gifts to Him. In return, the darkness of their hearts was lifted, and they left, refusing to return to Herod, but instead "departed to their own country by another way" (Mt 2:12).

But we know that not everyone wants this light that our Lord offers. Herod did not. We remember that he also pursued the Wisdom of God. But instead of seeking illumination from Him, Herod sought His blood, preferring earthly power to heavenly blessings. His vision was too narrow to see that in trying to protect his throne he was keeping himself in the darkness of sin, ignorance, and selfish ambition.

Seeing these examples before us, we need the light of Christ's Nativity in our world darkened with confusion, anxiety, and temptations. We might struggle to see this light in our suffering world, racked by a pandemic, and with societal changes coming at an alarming rate. We acutely feel the words of St. Paul: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:22-23).

Be encouraged! It is into our world, "groaning in travail," that our Deliverer is born. God in His love for mankind did not leave the world in darkness but came as its Savior. Even today Christ has "shone to the world the light of wisdom" (Nativity Troparion). We can see this light by unreservedly following the gospel and trading the earthly for the heavenly. Because of the light which shines from the cave this morning, the shadows of ignorance are dispelled and we are able to perceive the world as an object of God's eternal love. For Herod, Christ's Nativity brought anxiety and a troubled heart. For us today, we are offered illumination and joy. Like the shepherds, Magi, and angels let us behold the Incarnation of the Son of God with reverence and pious hope, in full knowledge that the "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:16) is born for our redemption.

With all the blessings of the Feast, I remain sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada