

***To the Reverend Clergy and Devout Stewards
of the Greek Orthodox Communities
in the Metropolis of Boston***

CHRISTMAS REFLECTION 2011

Beloved in the Lord,

“And the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

On Christmas day, the Church proclaims to humanity the good tidings of the birth of the Savior who is *“Light of Light, True God of True God, begotten not created... who, “for us men and our salvation came down from heaven and was Incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man” (Confession of Faith).*

Holy Scripture, the hymnology of the Church, and the Orthodox Christian icon help us to focus on this, the greatest of mysteries. *“He who knows no beginning now begins to be, and the Logos is made flesh” (Doxastikon of Christmas Orthros).* The Divine Logos, *“He who by nature is invisible is seen today in the flesh”.* *“He lowered the heavens and came down to fashion corrupt Adam anew”* (hymns from the Lity authored by John the monk).

St. Paul writing to the Galatians proclaims that God sent forth His Son, *“so that we may receive adoption as Sons” (4,5).* To the Romans, he speaks of the consequences of this salvific miracle: *“If we are children of God, then we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Romans 8:17).*

Studying the icon of the Nativity, we learn that Christmas is a Paschal mystery which culminates in the passion, death and Resurrection of Christ. The Incarnate Savior is seen in a sepulcher-shaped manger. He is wrapped in a winding burial cloth foreshadowing His repose in a sepulcher hewn from rock following his Crucifixion (Luke 23:53). The infant Jesus is not placed in a cradle, but on an altar of sacrifice symbolizing His death. The icon of the Nativity, however, points beyond darkness and death. A brilliant ray of light and an image of a dove pierce the darkness of the cave to symbolize the presence of the Holy Spirit. Above is the hand of the Father, the source of life. On the altar lies the incarnate Christ. In the poverty and misery of a manger, the three persons of the Holy Trinity appear. God is present and makes Himself known.

It is of paramount importance for us *“to arise and behold the divine condescension from on high that is made manifest to us.” (Sticheron of the Sixth Hour)*. This is indeed difficult. The obstacles to Christian faith and practice raised by secular culture have unquestionably affected our lives. We are immersed in an environment beset by cynicism, apathy and selfishness -- in a society that has lost its spiritual roots. Our culture has no time to reflect upon the “reason for the season.” It is reported that 98% of the references in various media highlight the impact of Christmas on the economy, on travel, on retail sales, etc. Few stories refer to the Son of God. Sadly, the media is only part of our culture which is determined to push Christ out of our sphere of interest. Public and private schools throughout America have removed references to Christmas from the classroom. The lyrics of traditional Christmas songs have been changed. ‘Silent Night’ has been changed to “Cold in the Night”. “We wish you a Merry Christmas” has been changed to “We wish you a swinging holiday.”

Under the influence of hedonistic consumerism, Christmas has lost its true meaning. Recently, shoppers filled retail department stores beginning at midnight in what has come to be known as “Black Friday”. Regrettably, some individuals -- armed with pepper spray cans! -- proved that they knew the price of

everything and the value of nothing. The wisdom of the world claims that happiness comes from what you own, how much money or influence you have, how important other people think you are. St Paul reminds us that we celebrate the birth of Him who, *“through he was rich, yet for your (our) sake became poor, so that by his poverty you (we) may become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9)*. We celebrate the birth of Him who asks us, *“what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? (Matthew 16:26)*

Christmas has always disturbed the conscience of the materialistic world. It has always challenged those who are on a frantic race to enrichment at all cost. It has always challenged those individuals whose selfishness and greed exploit the dignity and rights of their fellow human beings.

My brothers and sisters,

This Christmas, let us pause from the hustle and bustle of our daily routines to be alone with God. To pray. To read Holy Scripture. To read and reflect upon the beautiful hymns of our church which help us to focus on the Christmas miracle. Let us turn off our radios and televisions, our iPhones and iPads and everything else that is electronic. Let us hear the voices of the archangels proclaiming the birth of the Savior. Let us close our eyes to the blinding lights of the world so that we may see the light emanating from the cave in Bethlehem.

May that light radiate in our hearts and enlighten our minds this Christmas and every day of the New Year 2012.

**With Archpastoral love
in the Incarnate Lord,**

**M E T H O D I O S
Metropolitan of Boston**