

THE HOLY ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON

ENCYCLICAL FOR THE NATIVITY OF OUR SAVIOUR

by His Eminence Ephraim, Metropolitan of Boston

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

My Beloved Orthodox Christians:

Perhaps because of my sickness and my occasional inability to express my thoughts clearly — especially after my stroke — one of my favorite sermons is the one given by Saint Gregory Palamas on the feast day of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple, celebrated on November 21. In this sermon, the Saint explains that when one is dealing with things divine, it makes no difference whether one is a good speaker or a poor speaker when trying to explain the acts of God. In either case, the speaker will fall far short of his goal.

As the Saint says, "If one were to attempt to touch the stars, it would not make any difference whether you were tall or short — you would still fail. And if one were to attempt to describe things that pass understanding, it would not make any difference whether you were well-educated and eloquent, or if you were unlettered and a simpleton — you would fail nonetheless."

The same is true when one seeks to explain the mystery of the Nativity of our Saviour. All explanations fail.

Yet, there is one aspect concerning our Saviour's birth in the flesh concerning which we can speak with assurance, and that is regarding the many Old Testament prophecies of our Saviour's birth, His sojourn on earth, His passion, and His resurrection.

When Saint Athanasius the Great, one of the Church's most prominent Fathers, was a young man of around twenty-two years of age, he wrote about this very subject in his work, *On the Incarnation of the Word*.

In this remarkable work, which to this day is one of the great monuments of the Christian faith, the Saint demonstrates clearly that our Saviour Jesus Christ is both God and man, and that He is truly the awaited Messiah of the people of Israel.

The following excerpt from this exceptional work exemplifies the power of the Saint's words:

The Scripture says: 'Fear not, our God will come and save us (Esaias 35:4). Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb be eloquent!

Now what can the Jewish people say to this, or how can they dare to face this at all? For the prophecy not only indicates that God is to sojourn here among us, but it also announces the signs and the time of His coming.

For the Scriptures connect the blind recovering their sight, and the lame walking, and the deaf hearing, and the tongue of the stammerers being made eloquent, with the Divine Coming which is to take place. Let the Jewish people tell us, then, when such signs had come to pass in Israel, or where in Judea anything of the sort had occurred. Neeman the leper was cleansed, but no deaf man heard, nor did any lame man walk. Elias raised a dead man; so did Eliseus; but no one who was blind from birth regained his sight.

When, then, have these signs taken place, save when the Word of God Himself came in the body? For this was the very thing the Jews said who were witnesses to these miracles at that time: 'Since time began, it was never heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.'

Truly, this which has come to pass with our Saviour's Nativity in the flesh is that which was prophesied by the Holy Prophet David in the Book of Psalms, when he proclaimed:

"The Lord hath sent redemption unto His people."
(Ps. 110:8)

These are the very words that we chant in the Holy Liturgy while the faithful are receiving the Holy Mysteries on the feast of our Lord's coming in the flesh.

My beloved, I have no money to leave you as an inheritance, neither do I have any material possessions worth mentioning, nor any properties, nor expensive clothing, or jewelry, or vehicles, or stocks, or bank accounts, or shares in large corporations. Nor do I have any virtues worth imitating. The only priceless possession and treasure that I have is our incomparable Orthodox Christian Faith and the writings of the Saints of God, such as Saint Athanasius the Great and the other Church Fathers. If you can espouse and cherish

this boundless wealth that we have all inherited, then both you and I, and many others as well, will have become heirs of a magnificent and wealthy Kingdom that is everlasting and knows no end. And, since, as the final Doxasticon of the Matins of Christ's Nativity tells us, this "timeless and everlasting Kingdom of our Saviour has been inaugurated," let us, "in the stead of tribute money," offer Him the wealth of our Orthodox Faith, love, and devotion.

Truly, Christ is born! Let us glorify Him.!

Your fervent suppliant unto God,

✠Ephraim, Metropolitan

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