

Homily

The Child Who is God

The Nativity of Christ - December 25, 1999

St. Andrew Orthodox Church Riverside, Ca.

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The Joy of Human Birth. Christ is born! Glorify Him! Christ is come from heaven! Receive Him! Christ is on earth! Be ye lifted up! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen. Every human birth we rejoice in. Not in every human life, but certainly in every human birth we rejoice. And this for many reasons. Each birth we receive as a small consolation against death, which consumes everything. In the birth of a new person we sense a small victory, a glorious cooperation with God in the multiplication of life, even if it is but a delaying of death. So glorious is such an event that the Lord Jesus says, "Whenever a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more for joy that a child has been born into the world" (St. Jn. 16:21). Why else do we rejoice in birth? Because we know that we have contributed to the multiplication of God's image on the earth. Any child who is born is God's image, and the immaterial spirits gaze in awe at one who holds within himself both a soul and a body, uniting the unseen and the seen as nothing else in creation. We know that every child who is born has the potential to be a Saint. Every child born has the possibility of knowing and loving God in such a way that he will not only heal himself but save thousands and thousands around him. Every child born has that potential. And our rejoicing at birth is emphatic and doubly joyous when the one born is born into a dignified state: such as being born to a pious family, or perhaps royal offspring which will grow up and benefit the entire nation, the whole people. For these reasons and for more it is right and normal for us all to rejoice in birth.

The Exceedingly Great Joy of the Birth of Jesus Christ. Tonight we celebrate a birth and we are filled with joy. Not any joy, but a joy that is radiating throughout the universe. A joy that permeates heaven and causes the angelic choruses to break out into song, "Glory to God in the highest! And on earth peace, good will among men!" This joy unites all of mankind, kings and princes, shepherds and peasants, prophets and priests. And our joy is uncontainable because we know that this is not a normal human birth.

We are not simply rejoicing that we have in this birth won a small victory against death and participated with God in the creation of life. Wonder of wonders! We have indeed participated with God in such creation, for we have offered to the wonderworking God the Immaculate Virgin Mary who is the context and means of this mighty miracle! But He Who is born offers more than a small victory over death. He is the death of death! Today we have delivered a fatal blow to death! Not only will this Holy Child completely overturn death's presence in His own life, but He will eradicate death from mankind. "I have come that you might have life, and have it abundantly" (St. Jn. 10:10). "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son that whoever believes

in Him might not perish but have eternal life” (St. Jn. 3:16). Today is born He Who proclaims, “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death” (St. Jn. 8:51).

Today we rejoice not just in the fact that God’s image has been multiplied on the earth, and that the Child born today has the potential to be a Saint. We rejoice with “joy inexpressible and full of glory” because the Child born today is holier than all the Saints. He is “the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation” (Col. 1:15). He Who is born today is the “radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Heb. 1:3). Those Magi and shepherds today who gaze upon the Christ child gaze upon the eternal, immutable, incomprehensible, inexpressible God! Let the Jews and Moslems be offended, and let the heretics talk until their tongues ache, as St. Gregory says. For they will believe when they see this come coming in glory to judge all men. He Who “upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3) today is held in the arms of His Virgin Mother. He by Whom and for Whom “all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible” (Col. 1:16) today this Creator-God nurses from His mother’s breasts. The eternally Existent One Who is above everything we know as being and existence *becomes!* He Who is without a mother as God is Man without a Father. Today God the Father proclaims, “Let all my angels worship Him” (Heb. 1:6), and to His Son born in the cave He declares, “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever” (Heb. 1:8).

And today we do not rejoice emphatically because a child has been born into a pious family or even into human royalty and will grow up to offer some benefit to the entire people or nation. We rejoice because He Who is born today is the King of all Kings and the Lord of all Lords, and without leaving His family of the Father and Holy Spirit has entered into our family, bringing together what was considered impossible, even God and Man in perfect union. Mystical conjunction! The Self-Existent comes into being, the Uncreated is created, that which cannot be contained is contained! He Who gives riches becomes poor, so that we who are poor can become rich. He Who is always full empties Himself of His glory for a short while so that we who have become bereft of glory can be glorified in Him. For those who have bent themselves down to the ground because of sin He bends down from the heavens to raise us up with Himself from the earth. This One does not do merely do good to a few or offer some benefit to His nation. The Child born today, this Son given to us today, is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, and He comes to redeem the entire human race.

And so let us rejoice today in the enrollment prescribed by Quirinius for by it we are written in heaven. Let us adore the birth of Christ by which we are loosed from the chains of our own births. Let us honor today little Bethlehem which has become the door to Paradise. Let us worship the manger through which we, being bereft of reason and sense, are fed by the Word. As the Prophet Isaiah asks, today like the ox and the ass who warmed the Savior’s crib, let us know our Master! Come to the manger and look at and be looked at by the Great God Who is worshipped in Trinity and Whom we declare to be this day set forth before us as clearly as our flesh can allow, in the new born Child, Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom be the glory and honor forever. Amen.

*Throughout this homily images and phrases have consistently been taken from the *Homily on the Birth of Christ* by St. Gregory the Theologian.

