

## Nativity of Christ – 2021-2022

*Christ is born: give ye glory!  
Christ comes from heaven; greet ye Him!  
Christ is on earth; lift up your hearts!  
Sing to the Lord, O earth!*  
Irmos Ode 1

For more than two thousand years, the Holy Church has been calling her children lift your thoughts and heart on the wings of faith, which knows neither time nor space – into the distant antiquity, to the holy manger in Bethlehem.

“Heaven and earth will prophetically rejoice today, angels and men spiritually yes triumph - as if today God in the flesh appears to those who exist in darkness and shadow of death”...

And today with the solemn words of this church hymn, we greet all of you, dear brothers and sisters, calling you to meet and exalt Christ with dignity, born in Bethlehem, where the hearts of the entire Christian world are turned today.

Now we reverently remember and celebrate that one day in time, a moment of the great mystery of piety, *which hath been hid from ages and from generations* (Col. 1:26), turned into universal glory; nevertheless, remains still a secret, a great mystery of piety: God has appeared in the flesh.

Near Bethlehem in a cave, God descends to earth; The Son of God is born of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Only Begotten Son of God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, is born, descendant of the kings of the Jews, the Son of David and Solomon. A Son is born. More honorable than the cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the seraphim; born of the Holy Spirit. And how He is born! He is born in a nativity scene and is placed in a cattle manger. Instead of luxury - squalor, instead of the capital - the province of Judea, instead of courtiers - cattle in a stable and exhausted by wanderings, a poor, unknown family ... This is how the earth met its Creator, this is how Judah met its God.

His Mother alone bends over the newborn Infant. What humility! For Son Of God, equal to God the Father, for Himself the very birth on earth is the greatest and unparalleled humility and here such a birth that is even the most unfortunate of the sons of men!

By this His humility, the Child being born gives an example of humility for all ages.

Already by His birth in the nativity scene, by His position in the manger, Christ teaches us to leave off the earthly and strive for the heavenly. "*Christ on earth - lift up your hearts!*" – the Church sings today, how can we – estranged and strangers – not think about Heaven Fatherland, how can we not turn to the heavenly Jerusalem, as once the captives of Babylon turned to the earthly? Where our treasure is, there will be our heart also. In heaven, all our eternal treasures,

where there is Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father, there we need to ascend more often with the thoughts of our souls, the feelings of the heart, all our joys and all our sorrows, to be lifted up with our mind *on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Col 3:2).

This teaching of Christ was understood at His very birth, but not equally received. Whole armies of heaven, a great multitude of heavenly angels saw humility and the humiliation of the Son of God, saw His ineffable condescension for the salvation of man, saw and with a great voice glorified God: "Glory to God in the highest!"

And not only Angels glorified God. The Angels announced great joy to the shepherds outside Bethlehem; they *came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them* (Luke 2:16, 20). Why did the shepherds rejoice? Weren't they still they poor? Did they not return to the same flocks? Their life remained the same, but they understood that a poor lot does not separate you from God, and wealth does not brings you closer to Him. God sends His grace to everyone who seeks it and who is worthy of it, Be it nobleman or shepherd, king or warrior, rich or poor, old man or infant. The humble shepherds of Bethlehem understood this, their hearts were filled with joy, and they returned to their flocks with great spiritual joy.

But Christ was revealed not only to the shepherds. Led by a wonderful star, the Wise Men came to Bethlehem from the far East. Church tradition calls them kings, they were of royal childbirth. But their nobility and wealth did not prevent them from being kind people. They were scientists, and science did not remove them from God, but helped them to find the Lord. Servants to the stars, they were taught to bow with a star to the Sun of Truth born in Bethlehem. Entering cave, the Magi humbly fell, bowed to the unknown Child and brought Him rich gifts.

But there were other people as well. Herod heard about the birth of Christ, Herod was embarrassed and *all Jerusalem with him* (Matt. 2: 3) and Herod plans to destroy the Child; publishes the cruel order to kill all the babies of Bethlehem, and with this order the incarnate Christ; He wants to kill Him, only to save his earthly position. But doing so, by himself Herod destroyed not only his power and his palaces, but also his very soul.

How many such "Herods" are now found among people, sometimes even calling themselves Christians, but who do not want to live according to the law of God, who put above this everything in the world, their sick self-esteem and will not sacrifice an inch of it, even for the sake of lofty goals.

There are still people who, like Herod, would like to reign and rule over all, and as soon as they see an apparent rival, they are ready to wipe him off the face of the earth. If they do not succeed, then they produce a genuine "beating of babies" around them – take up arms with rage against innocent people, produce terrible troubles and shocks, so that "crying, sobbing and weeping of many" is really heard everywhere. And all this only in the name of sick lust for power and ambition.

And the events taking place now on a worldwide scale only confirm these words.

In our time, when the Gospel has already been preached everywhere, it is preached by the Church and now - what do we see in life, if not criminal indifference and disregard for the great cause our salvation? Is mankind living a new life in Christ, is it living the high aspirations and ideals of the Gospel, does it build its life according to the teachings of Christ Savior and His saving commandments?

What is unfolding with such swiftness now before our eyes clearly speaks to us, Orthodox Christians, that the forces of antichrist are raging, preparing his rule. The world panics, and this panic is purposefully whipped up by those who imagine themselves to be "creators of life", because when a person is panicky and afraid for his life, for the life of people close to him, he ceases to think critically, he is open to any manipulation.

The external threat of disunity to our unity in Christ is greatly facilitated by the threat of panic and fear that has actually arisen in society before being infected with the virus, supposedly, with a high probability of death.

This phenomenon is already acquiring the character of a dangerous pandemic of fear and hysteria, captivating people who have not accepted faith in their calling – the acquisition of eternal life with God in Christ Jesus.

But let our heart not be confused. In these conditions of deviations from the truths of faith and normal moral principles, a Christian should most of all be concerned about how to maintain faith and faithfulness to God and His holy law.

Let us try to correspond, according to our weak strength, to the Lord's great love for us, how can the Creator's love correspond to His creatures; fallen creatures: let us repent! Let us not repent with our lips alone; let us witness our repentance with more than a few, short tears, nor with one external participation in church services, in the performance of church rites, which the Pharisees were content with. We must bring along with tears, with outward piety, and fruit worthy of repentance: let us change a sinful life for an evangelical life, freeing ourselves from the power of passions, let us learn to truly love and have compassion for our neighbor, and by this we will prove our loyalty to the Lord.

In the holy book, *The Apocalypse*, there are wonderful words that the Lord says to the one who remained faithful to Him: *Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth* (Rev. 3,8,10).

Wonderful, comforting words! The Lord promises special mercy and protection to His faithful. And isn't this what the present solemn Feast tells us?

Today we solemnly celebrate the Incarnation of the Eternal God, Who becomes God-man for the sake of all mankind, in order to redeem us from original sin, washing us in baptismal waters, consecrating us with Holy Communion and other Mysteries, granting to those who believe in Him the opportunity to enter the Kingdom of God, the opportunity freely (as well as befits a

godlike creature) to strive toward the higher worlds and become citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom.

O God, what great opportunities a believing Christian has!

Let us fly on the wings of faith to distant Bethlehem, rise up at the call of the Church, like shepherds before the blessed manger in which the salvation of the world lies and, imitating the wise Magi, we will bring to the incarnate God-Infant Christ, the Savior of the world our gifts - gifts of faith, hope and grateful love, Let's join the choir of heavenly Angels, singing now: "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth!"

**CHRIST IS BORN – GIVE YE GLORY!**

Congratulations to my fellow Bishops, clergy, monastics and all God-loving flock our Church. Greetings on the Nativity of Christ, with wishes for the joy of a new life brought to earth by Christ!

+ *humble Tikhon*  
*By the grace of God, Archbishop of Omsk and Siberia*  
*First Hierarch of the Russian True Orthodox Church*  
*Nativity of Christ, 2021 / 2022*