

December 25, 2018

Christmas



The first to hear the good news of the savior's birth were not the rulers and religious leaders of Israel who were robed in riches and power. The angels first came to those who were humble and ready to receive the newborn king who was born in poverty and was now lying in a manger made for animals. Just as God had chosen and anointed David, a lowly shepherd of Bethlehem to become the shepherd king of Israel, so Jesus likewise chose the path of humility and lowliness in coming to Israel as the good shepherd king. He would lay down his life for their sake and salvation. After the angels had sung their

hymn of glory in the presence of the shepherds, the shepherds made haste to adore the newborn king and sing their hymn of glory as well.

Many of the early church fathers have written hymns and homilies in praise of the Incarnation. John the Monk, an 8th century writer, in his Hymn of the Nativity, sings of the great exchange in the mystery and wonder of the Incarnation - God becoming man in order to bring man to heaven:

Heaven and earth are united today, for Christ is born! Today God has come upon earth, and humankind gone up to heaven. Today, for the sake of humankind, the invisible one is seen in the flesh. Therefore let us glorify him and cry aloud: glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace bestowed by your coming, Savior: glory to you! Today in Bethlehem, I hear the angels: glory to God in the highest! Glory to him whose good pleasure it was that there be peace on earth! The Virgin is now more spacious than the heavens. Light has shone on those in darkness, exalting the lowly who sing like the angels: Glory to God in the highest! Beholding him [Adam] who was in God's image and likeness fallen through transgression, Jesus bowed the heavens and came down, without change taking up his dwelling in a virgin womb, that he might refashion Adam fallen in corruption, and crying out: glory to your epiphany, my Savior and my God! [*Stichera (hymn) of the Nativity of the Lord*]

Why was it necessary for the Word of God to become flesh? We needed a savior who could reconcile us with God. Throughout the ages Christians have professed the ancient Nicene Creed: "He became man for our sake and for the sake of our salvation." The eternal Word became flesh for us so he could offer his life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world through the shedding of his blood on the cross. The Word became flesh to show us the infinite love and tender mercy of God for us sinners.

In the feast of Christmas we celebrate present realities - Jesus Christ our redeemer who reigns in heaven and who also lives and reigns in our hearts through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit. And we commemorate past events - the birth of the newborn Messiah King and his manifestation to Israel and to the gentile nations. We thank God for the way in which he has saved us from the power of sin and the curse of death and destruction by sending his son to ransom us and give us pardon and abundant life through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit. Today we celebrate the birthday of our King and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God wants to fill our hearts anew with joy and gratitude for the greatest gift he could possibly give us - his beloved Son Jesus. What can we give thanks for in this great feast of the Incarnation? We can praise and thank God our Father for the fact that the Son of God freely and joyfully assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. Jesus came to release the captives from slavery to sin and to open the gates of paradise once again. This day the Holy Spirit invites us to make haste - as the shepherds of Bethlehem did - to adore Jesus our King and Messiah. The Lord Jesus Christ is our eternal good shepherd who guides and cares for us unceasingly and who gives us abundant everlasting life and union with the triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This day the whole community of heaven joins with all believers of good will on earth in a jubilant song of praise for the good news proclaimed by the angels on Christmas eve: Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people, for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11).

The joy of Christmas is not for a day or a season. It is an eternal joy, a joy that no one can take from us because it is the joy of Jesus Christ himself made present in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. The Lord gives us a supernatural joy which no pain nor sorrow can diminish, and which neither life nor death can take away.



G C P M E H E F F N Y Y A S E
 V F I O G K N O C Y R R I L B
 Z H S J Z X U H E G A B Z N B
 H A T I D U R X S Z M E I P E
 R P L R S I L E N T N I G H T
 R K O Q S N E M E S I W A J H
 Y L X T Y Z S W C Z S P E P L
 M I M F H F N P N S J V E K E
 J A B T T B A R I O R S X Z H
 S A I Y L Y T E K V O F L W E
 H A Y E Y T I G N J I O E E M
 F A M K R H V N A E V U G P E
 M A A N W A I A R S A S N O E
 C I H O T C T M F U S O A H F
 D J E D K Q Y S V S W T E K Q

JESUS	HAY
MARY	ANGEL
JOSEPH	FAITH
WISEMEN	HOPE
MANGER	FRANKINCENSE
NATIVITY	MYRRH
BETHLEHEM	SILENT NIGHT
CAMEL	LORD
DONKEY	SAVIOR
STAR	CHRISTMAS



MERRY CHRISTMAS