

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

To the Venerable Pastors, God-loving Monastics and Devout Children of our Diocesan Family:

Today the Virgin gives birth to Him who is above all being, and the earth offers a cave to Him whom no man can approach. Angels with shepherds give glory, and Magi journey with a star. For unto us is born a young Child, the pre-eternal God. (Kontakion)

The glorious feast of the Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is a great day filled with heavenly mysteries that are beyond our human comprehension. Never before and never since the events which took place in the reign of Cesar Augustus has mankind witnessed the pre-eternal God being born as a babe, or a virgin giving birth to a divine child while remaining virgin, or a cave offering a dwelling place to the One Who dwells in the heavens.

Even though these mysteries surpass our understanding, and even though we are far removed from their historical occurrence, we are nevertheless able to participate in those mysteries and to enter into the miracles that took place in those days. We are given to do this through the great gift of our Orthodox liturgical experience, which refers not simply to the time we spend in church but rather to the journey of our whole life.

Our liturgical journey always is comprised of three elements: preparation, participation and thanksgiving. Our preparation for the present feast was the time we spent in prayer and fasting during the Lenten days which we have passed through. Our participation is our communion with Christ through the beautiful services and through our partaking of the Holy Eucharist. Our thanksgiving is the life that we are now called to lead as we bear in our hearts the grace of the Nativity of Christ.

As we celebrate the union of heaven and earth today, let us offer our own lives as a gift to the Lord and offer praise like the angels *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to men.*

With love in Christ,

+ TIKHON
Bishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania