



## ENCYCLICAL

### For the Holy Nativity of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ

*“He came not to be served but to serve,”*

The God-Man as Slave and  
Servant and Sacrifice

*Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ  
and Children in the Incarnate Lord,*

Finding ourselves, today, on that lofty spiritual mountain to which we have been brought by our Orthodox worship, which makes us more lofty and Divine, let us invoke the Grace of our Savior, Christ, that we might elevate ourselves even more. “Christ appears on earth, be ye lifted up!”<sup>1</sup> This salvific ascent to which we are summoned, on the holy day of the Nativity of our Lord, by the words, “Be ye lifted up!” cannot be attained by any other means than that of the ineffable humility of our Master.

Blessed be the name of our all-merciful Lord for His outpouring of Love for us sinful and ungrateful men. Because of this Love, according to the Holy Apostle Paul, God “emptied Himself, taking on the form of a servant,”<sup>2</sup> assuredly without change of any kind occurring in His Divine Nature. “Remaining what He was,” says St. John Chrysostomos, “He took on what He was not, and becoming flesh, He remained God, being the Word [*Logos*].”<sup>3</sup>

But this self-emptying Love, which led our Savior, Who is God, to assume the form of a servant, was only the first step on the ladder of His extreme humility. The Master, Who became a Slave, now becomes a Servant and lives among His disciples and mankind “as one who serveth,”<sup>4</sup> as a Servant Who even bent down and washed the feet of the Holy Apostles. “He Who is served by the entire rational and holy creation,” says St. Cyril of Alexandria, “Who is enthroned and reigns with God the Father, assuming the rank of a servant, washed the feet of His Disciples.”<sup>5</sup>

This second step on the ladder of Divine humility comprised a conscious and intentional path taken by our Lord, as He revealed this to His Disciples: “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.”<sup>6</sup>

But His Love had to extend to the last step of humility: the Shep-

herd becomes the Lamb for sacrifice, so that He might attain “even unto death, yea, death on the Cross.”<sup>7</sup> It was in this way that our Master, as the cleansing sacrifice, completed His mission of salvation: “to lay down His life as a ransom for many.”<sup>8</sup>

Behold this divine ladder: God becomes a *Slave*; then He becomes a *Servant*; and finally, He becomes a *Sacrifice*.

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*Beloved Children in the Lord,*

The descent on these three steps of the Divine ladder by Christ our Savior gave us a prototype of life, which completely and radically reversed the world’s way of thinking. In God’s Family, our Holy Orthodox Church, one must never forget that the most fundamental Principle of life in Christ is to serve others with self-emptying and sacrificial love.

Our Church’s tradition of Scriptural interpretation presents the Lord as saying: “I impress it upon you, that you attain first place by serving others and laboring for others”<sup>9</sup>

This, then, is the saving Message of the Incarnation of the Word; this is our sacred duty; and only through this self-emptying and sacrificial love will we be “lifted up,” and hence “lift up together with us” our fellow man and the world, “to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,”<sup>10</sup> by the intercessions of the Mother of the Most High, herself being “Higher than the Heavens,” to the glory of our Savior, to Whom is due worship and thanksgiving with the Father and the Holy Spirit unto the ages. Amen.

*Your intercessor before the Incarnate Lord,  
† Cyprian of Oropos and Fili  
President of the Holy Synod in Resistance*

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Notes

1. First Canon for the Nativity of Christ, Ode 1, Heirmos.
2. Philippians 2:7.
3. St. John Chrysostomos, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXII, col. 251.
4. St. Luke 22:27.
5. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXXII, col. 913A.
6. St. Matthew 20:28; St. Mark 10:45.
7. Philippians 2:8.
8. St. Matthew 20:28.
9. Blessed Zigabenos, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CXXIX, col. 544B.
10. II St. Peter 1:8.

Source: *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2 (2001), pp. 16-17.