



Church of the **G**enuine **O**rthodox **C**hristians of **G**reece
The **H**oly **S**ynod

Protocol no. 2978

Athens, December 14/27, 2019

Nativity Message for 2019

“A Mystery wondrous and extraordinary do I behold”

Beloved Fathers and Brothers, Beloved Children in the Lord:

The Nativity of Christ is the Feast of the Divine Condescension, which we taste amid the warm embrace of our Holy Orthodox Church. The Holy Gospel affirms that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (St. John 1:14). It is truly a wondrous and extraordinary Mystery, to which the Holy Angels bear witness with regard to the Birthgiving of the Ever-Virgin in a manner surpassing nature through the Holy Spirit.

We find ourselves before an incomprehensible act of the Preëternal God in time, the purpose of which is to raise the dead, to free the captive, to redeem him who is imprisoned in corruption and the passions, and ultimately to deify man, fashioned by God and yet fallen away from Him. For, according to Saint Athanasios the Great, “The Word became flesh so that He might render man capable of receiving Divinity.”

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If this astounding event of the Divine Incarnation, which took place in Bethlehem of Judæa, is to be received and experienced properly in our life as a great Mystery, it is needful that we be initiated into the Mystery: thus, it is



indispensable that we renounce a secular way of thinking, turn away from sin, and repent, and also that we prepare a suitable place for the Mystery in our minds and hearts.

The Mystery is occluded and hidden by our many worldly diversions, by way primarily of gastronomic interests, materialistic extravagance, vanity of every kind, and indulgence in debauchery, drunkenness, wantonness, and the cares of this life.

It is all too typical that when the All-Holy Virgin, who was with Child, and the Righteous Joseph the Betrothed were seeking a place to stop and stay overnight, there was no such place in Bethlehem. All of the lodging houses were filled to capacity: “There was no room for them in the inn” (St. Luke 2:7).

Thus, for the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, there was only a cold and dark cave, a place of shelter for irrational animals, a stable.

This deficiency did not exist only back then. The majority of people are habitually so full—that is, in reality so empty—that they find neither place nor time for the God-Man in their lives. The mind is replete with a heap of other things, unworthy and sinful, with the result that the Divine teaching of the Gospel and the consolation of compunctious prayer do not make their way into it. And the heart is hermetically sealed, cold and icy, so that Divine Grace does not enter to renew and transform it.

The people of today are for the most part busy and in a hurry, have interminable worries and distractions, as well as fears and insecurities. As a result, they have no time left over nor any inclination for Christ and, naturally, none for their fellow men, but only the time and inclination to satisfy that which pleases them. Their brains are brimming with all manner of ideas and opinions, to say nothing of delusions and nonsense. And their hearts are swollen with overweening egotism, individualism, hedonism, and indifference, or even terrified by fantastic scenarios and rumors, and also embittered by life’s various disappointments and tribulations. What prevails is vapid curiosity, superficial extroversion, and an inability to focus the mind or foster a self-sacrificial attitude towards God and man. One observes a lack of spiritual zeal, a tendency to criticize and reject everything, a pursuit of automatic and magical solutions, an abdication of responsibilities, and a cultivation of reprehensible compromises in faith and life.

In this way, however, we are imprisoned in our ego, with mind and heart impervious to Divine visitation, advent, and abidance.

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Children in the Lord Who is Born:

The Divine Infant longs to find lodging in us through the Mysteries, since He was Born in a cave out of exceeding love and humility, provided we desire it and prepare ourselves suitably. Let us open a space, let us leave a place open in our minds and hearts. Repentance in the Church betokens internal emptying of all those things that are piled up and bar entrance to our Lord and God, but also render it difficult for us to achieve mutual understanding and coexistence with our brethren. The young Child, the preëternal God, awaits our poor gifts, too, and our sincere worship with true and guileless faith, with love and humility, in deeds, indeed, and not just in words.

Wherever Christ enters, Heaven descends and Paradise blooms. The Angels give glory, all things are filled with joy, and creation exults. Light, purity, fragrance, hymnody, and praise hold sway, and peace prevails and reigns!

Let us not remain strangers to this radiant heavenly and earthly gladness, unable to participate therein! May there exist in us a place for God to sojourn, so that we may receive the unwaning Light and be transformed into beneficent persons, fiery souls, and bearers and transmitters of faith, hope, and love!

Christ is Born!

With paternal best wishes and blessing of
† Archbishop Kallinikos of Athens
and the Members of the Holy Synod