

## IN CHRIST YOU ARE A NEW CREATION

*Homily from the Sunday after Nativity, December 27, 2015, by Father Michael Margitich*

I welcome and greet you with that time-honored salutation, “Christ is born!—Glorify Him!” During the Christmas season, the Church, through her hymns and prayers, proclaims the core doctrine of our Christian faith that is—in one word—the incarnation. The incarnation is the mystery of the eternal Word of God taking on human flesh, not adopting it, but uniting Himself completely with our nature. The mystery and silence of eternity has been broken and union with God Himself is a reality for those who love Him. That which is beyond all human logic, that which is, in fact, indescribable and, as it says in the Divine Liturgy, incomprehensible, the infinite God, becomes one of us. It is indeed beyond logic, beyond human reason. It is one of those great mysteries in life that we accept by faith and come to know for ourselves in our relationship with the Savior. God comes on earth—He Who governs human history becomes a Child of the Virgin, and in so doing calls us to salvation, which is union with Him. “Long lay the world in sin and error pining” says the Christmas Carol, until He, the Christ Child, “appeared and the world felt its worth.” Why? Why does the earth and heaven rejoice? Because God and man are now reconciled, united in the Word of God, and we are given access to the Kingdom here and now in the Church, where sons and daughters are born from above in the water of baptism.

Listen once again to the angelic announcement made to the shepherds, not to the kings, but to the shepherds. “I bring you glad tidings of great joy who will be for all peoples”—underline that, for all peoples —“for there is born this day in the City of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” As if to emphasize this great mystery, the angel also appears to Joseph and Mary and says to them, “You shall call his name, Jesus, which means Savior.”

Each year on the Sunday following Christmas, the church commemorates three members of our Lord’s earthly family: David, the Prophet and King; the Apostle James, the brother of our Lord, Jesus; and Joseph, the foster father of our Lord.

But in this season, there is also another dimension or perspective which we seldom remember, but should always keep in mind: today the Church emphasizes a very clear message—we are reminded of the cost of discipleship, since today on the church calendar we recall

the martyrdom of Stephen, the first deacon, and protomartyr, who was stoned to death because of his faith, love and preaching of Christ. We should not forget that Christians follow the crucified Messiah, and that’s a scandal to the world. The message of the Cross, and our response (to take up and follow, or not) undergird everything we say and do in the Church.

I had an interesting conversation with one of our neighbors, who said to me, “I really enjoy Christmas. It gives me a boost. But it goes by too fast and it is a downer.” I wonder how many of us feel that way? The day after Christmas, we are again confronted with earthly reality. We are confronted with the same issues and problems and difficulties and even disappointments.

But the message of Christmas can never fade. It is always bright. It is always joyful. It is always relevant because, as the scriptures tell us, Jesus is called Emmanuel, which means *God is with us*. “Understand all ye people,” understand and repent, “for God is with us” (Isaiah).

On the basis of today’s reading, let’s take a brief look and see how Christmas affected the Shepherds, the Virgin Mary and the Wise Men.

St. Luke tells us that the Shepherds, after hearing the angelic choir singing “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men” and after worshipping the Christ Child, they returned to their fields. But there is a profound difference, because we read that they had glorified and praised God for the things they had seen and heard. There was no “downer.” They went back singing and praising God. Although it was the day after, there was no letdown. Something profound had happened; something profoundly life changing. They went back to their fields with a song in their heart for now God was with them as the angel told them. Now, as the poet has written, “The wind blows, the snow falls, but the love that flows from the Child’s crib warms the world.” There can be no letdown.

St. Luke also tells us about the Virgin Mary. How she kept the words of the angels and how she experienced something immaculate and incredible. The scriptures tell us she pondered these blessed things that she herself experienced. For Mary, there was no letdown because she pondered all of these things in her heart. Yes, there was the flight into Egypt, and the massacre of the children,

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but that comes from evil. “Light is come into the world,” and that remains always, even if, as St John wrote “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

As for the Wise Men, listen carefully: “After worshipping and presenting their gifts to the newborn King,” the New Testament tells us they went home another way. Why? Not only to avoid Herod’s deceit. No. Rather, because what the Wise Men *had seen and experienced* changed their lives. No one—and let me emphasize this at the risk of exaggeration—*no one* who has ever met, found and accepted Christ, lives an old life; you go a different way from that point on. *No one* stays the same. Motives, values, priorities, attitudes can no longer be the same, because once you have met and accepted Christ as the Savior (not just *your* Savior, but the Savior of the world), life radically changes. We now live not from with a worldly perspective, but in light of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Cross and the Resurrection. Christmas means we become a “new creation in Christ,” and we no longer accept what society, the world, the flesh and the devil want us to believe. “Old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Now...let us go another way—God’s way. For God has revealed Himself to us in the vulnerable Christ Child, but with the words ringing in our ears, “I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly.” As we take down our Christmas decorations, let us be careful and mindful not to remove Christ. He was not meant for the attic; not meant for the garage, but for the living room of your

heart throughout the year. If He, Christ the King, the “everlasting Father,” (Isaiah) dwells in our life, then there will be no letdown when the song of the angels is still; when the star in the sky is gone, when the wise men are home, when the shepherds are back with their flock, when suffering visits us; the work of Christmas continues, as those of you, who on Christmas Eve, accepted the work of caring for the homeless who came to us for the Nomadic Shelter. I admire you for this and your witnessing in such a beautiful way. You could have done something else, but you chose to serve the needy, the hungry, the lonely, the rejected, to minister to the lost, to heal the broken, to bring peace. That is our task as part of being a new creation, as being citizens of the Kingdom, witnesses of the incarnation of the Word of God. ***Christ is born! Glorify Him!***

## THE NEW HUMANITY

“The Son of the Most High has become Son of man in order to make man son of God,” says Saint Irenaeus. In the new humanity built upon the foundation stone of the Incarnation of the Son of God, the unity of our human nature which has been broken by sin is being restored. This new humanity Christ Himself has named the Church...The Church as a whole, and also in her individual members, thinks and pursues perfection through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Each man solely through his bond with the Church receives all the necessary means needed for his moral regeneration.... The work of Christ is the creation of the Church, the new humanity. Christ’s work as we understand it is in all reality unique; boundlessly it stays aloof of every human achievement. Too often nowadays there are those who come across parallels with the teaching of Christ in the pagan literature, in Buddhism, in the Talmud, in Babylon and Egypt. However, one, who sees Christ as the incarnated Son of God, finds all that talk about the historical “influences” on Christianity devoid of any meaning. The essence of Christ’s work abides not in His teaching; hence it is evidently nonsense and even an offense to reduce Christ to the same level as wise men—teachers, like: Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, etc. Christ made mankind partake in the Divine nature, he infused in human nature new powers of grace, He has built the Church, He has sent down to us the Holy Spirit. None of this could have been done by any teacher-man, no matter how lofty the verities preached by him, how ingenious and great the books written by his pen. —*St. Hilarion Troitsky, martyred December 28, 1929*

## EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- THE FOURTH Annual Thanksgiving Dinner Project “Families to Families” was a great success thanks to the donors who gave funds to purchase and assemble 100 Thanksgiving Dinners (turkey, stuffing, potatoes, dessert, coffee, etc). Many thanks to those who made it happen.
- ROHNERT PARK STUDY GROUP: Deacons Jeremiah and Nicholas continue with talks on Tuesday evenings at 7 PM on the topic of the so-called “Great Schism” (separation of the Eastern and Western Christians). The Study Group meets at Gretchen McPherson’s home, 6063 Elsa Ave., Rohnert Park, (707) 584-4205.
- BAPTISMS: On Saturday, December 3 at 10 AM, Irini and Brendan’s baby Romanos will be baptized. Following that, Ioana and Kevin Flores’ baby Alden will be baptized. We congratulate both families.
- PROJECT MEXICO: The spiritual director of Project Mexico will be visiting our parish on Saturday, Dec. 3 at Vespers. After Vespers there will be a dinner and a presentation on the work of Project Mexico. All are welcome, but please contact Bonnie Alexander, Serge Anderson or Fr. Lawrence if you would like to attend this dinner event, Saturday, December 3, at 6 PM. The presentation and dinner will take place at the Anderson home, or if the response is very good, here in the Parish Hall. Please let us know if you plan to attend.
- CALISTOGA MONASTERY WORK PARTY: The Men’s Group is invited to participate in a work party at Holy Assumption Monastery in Calistoga, on Saturday, December 10, starting at 10 AM. We apologize for the cancellation of the original work-party date and the mis-scheduling of the make-up date. Call/email Father Lawrence or Fr. Theodor if you will participate.
- SENIOR LUNCH FELLOWSHIP: Thursday, December 15, at Noon.
- TATIANA’S Mini Christmas Bazaar: December 11, following the Divine Liturgy. Any questions, please call Tatiana Castillo (707) 235-8911.
- MANY THANKS TO THOSE who made the guests with Nomadic Shelter feel welcomed and loved. Dinner was served, music was played, prayers were said, a church tour was given, and the guests bedded down for the night in the Hall. The next Nomadic Shelter will be on Thursday, December 22. Questions about volunteering should be directed to the coordinator of the program, Ambrose Ryan Inlow, at (707) 490-4700.
- UPCOMING: Archbishop Benjamin will be visiting us for the Feast of St. Seraphim, on January 2. Divine Liturgy will begin at 9:30 AM.
- THE ANNUAL Walk for Life in San Francisco will take place on Saturday, January 21, 12:30 PM. Father Lawrence will arrange transport.
- THE PARISH ANNUAL MEETING will be held on February 5, at 12:30 PM (always on the first Sunday of February).

### CHRISTMAS AT SAINT SERAPHIM

Carmen Anderson and Gloria Collins are preparing a Christmas play, featuring many of our parish children, to be performed on Sunday, Dec. 18. Prior to the play, there will be an Akathist at 4 PM in the Protection Church, followed by a dinner (which will be prepared by Serge Anderson).

During the week leading up to Nativity there are special Services of the “Prefeast.” **Tuesday–Thursday:** Matins at 8 AM and Vespers at 6 PM. **Friday, December 23,** the Royal Hours of Nativity at 9 AM, and Vespers at 6 PM. **Saturday, Christmas Eve,** our Children’s Choir will sing the Divine Liturgy, 9:30 AM.

The wonderful and festive Matins of Christmas will begin at **5 PM on Saturday, Christmas Eve.** Carols will be sung at the conclusion of the Matins. The Divine Liturgy for **Christmas Day** will begin at 9:30 AM, rather than 10 AM.

**PREPARATION FOR NATIVITY:** It is only right that all of us, lay and clergy alike, confess before, and commune on, the Great Feast Days of the Church year. This is particularly important for the Feasts of Nativity and, of course, Pascha. It is not appropriate for anyone over the age of seven to receive Holy Communion without a recent Confession (at least once a month is a good benchmark). We operate on the “honor system,” which means the priests will probably not ask you if you are prepared. Accordingly, each of us must take responsibility for Confession. So, let us all, adults and children, prepare ourselves for Communion on Nativity by making a Confession no later than the week before Christmas.

I will be available during that week every morning after Matins (about 9 AM) and every afternoon, before Vespers, from 4–6 PM. May the Lord grant us all a good and joyful repentance. —Fr. Lawrence

# PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## DECEMBER 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1  • 8 PM, <i>Cantiamo Christmas Concert</i>	2 <i>(Fr Lawrence at Calistoga Monastery all day)</i>  • 8 PM, <i>Cantiamo Christmas Concert</i>	3 • 10 AM, Baptism* • 11 AM, Baptism * • 3:30 PM, Catechism, <i>on Repentance and Faith</i> • 4 PM, Children's Choir • 5 PM, Vespers**
4 - <b>Great Martyr Barbara</b> • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 1:15 PM, Molieben to St. Peter the Aleut	5  <i>In San Anselmo: Vigil at 7 PM</i>	6 - <b>St. Nicholas Day</b> <i>In San Anselmo: Liturgy at 9:30 AM</i>  • 7 PM, Rohnert Park Study Group	7  • 6 PM, Vespers	8 <i>(Fr Lawrence in SF at meeting all day)</i>  • 7 PM, Parish Council	9	10 • 10 AM, <i>Calistoga Monastery Work Party</i> • 3:30 PM, Catechism, <i>on the Holy Spirit</i> • 5 PM, Vespers
11 - <b>Holy Ancestors of Christ</b> • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • <i>Tatiana's Mini-Christmas Bazaar</i>	12  • 6 PM, Vespers, Feast of St. Herman of Alaska	13 - <b>St. Herman Day</b> • 8:30 AM, Matins and Divine Liturgy  • 7 PM, Rohnert Park Study Group	14  • 5 PM, Redwood Empire Food Bank  • 6 PM, Vespers	15  • Noon, Senior Lunch Fellowship	16	17 • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy (Norwegian) • 3:30 PM, Catechism, <i>on the Church and the Virgin Mary</i> • 4 PM, Children's Choir • 5 PM, Vespers
18 - <b>Sunday before Nativity</b> • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 4 PM, <i>Akathist, Children's Christmas Play and Dinner</i>	19	20 • 8 AM, Pre-feast Matins, Confessions  • 6 PM, Pre-feast Vespers	21 • 8 AM, Pre-feast Matins, Confessions  • 6 PM, Pre-feast Vespers	22 • 8 AM, Pre-feast Matins, Confessions • 6 PM, Pre-feast Vespers • 6 PM, <b>Nomadic Shelter</b>	23 • 9 AM, Royal Hours for Nativity • Noon-4 PM, Confession • 6 PM, Pre-feast Vespers	24 - <b>Christmas Eve</b> • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy (Children's Choir)  • 5 PM, Festal Matins for Nativity
25 - <b>Nativity of Christ</b> • 9:30 AM, Festal Divine Liturgy ( <i>please note time</i> )	26 • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Synaxis of the Theotokos	27	28  • 6 PM, Vespers	29	30	31 <b>New Year's Eve</b>  • 5 PM, Great Vespers, Feast of St Basil

\* Saturday, December 3—Baptism of Romanos Schettig; 11 AM—Baptism of Baptism of Alden Flores

\*\* Saturday, December 3—After Vespers there will be a presentation by Fr Nicholas Andruchow on the work of **Project Mexico**