

A Sermon by St John of Kronstadt on the Nativity of Christ

The Word became flesh; that is, the Son of God, co-eternal with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit, became human – having become incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. O, wondrous, awesome and saving mystery! The One Who had no beginning took on a beginning according to humanity; the One without flesh assumed flesh. God became man – without ceasing to be God. The Unapproachable One became approachable to all, He becomes a humble servant. Why, and for what reason? Because, in His inexpressible mercy toward His creation, God could not bear to see the entire race of mankind—which, He, in creating, had endowed with wondrous gifts – enslaved by the devil, sin and death, suffering, darkness and fear—which is eternal suffering and torment.

And the Word became flesh! In order to make us earthly beings into heavenly ones, in order to make sinners into saints; in order to raise us up from corruption into incorruption, from earth to heaven; from enslavement to sin and the devil—into the glorious freedom of children of God; from death – into immortality, in order to make us sons and daughters of God and to seat us together with Him upon the Throne as His royal children.

The sinful human race is adopted by the Father; death is destroyed in each of us through the mystery of re-birth, that is, through baptism and repentance. People are freed of the tormenting, death-bearing authority of the devil, of the afflictions of sin and of various passions. Human nature is made Godlike for the sake of the boundless compassion of the Son of God. Those in darkness are enlightened by the Divine light of grace and reason. To the human heart, the heart of Christ is given. The perishable is made immortal. Those naked and wounded by sin and by passions are adorned in Divine glory. Those who hunger and thirst are fed and refreshed by the soul-strengthening Word of God and by the most pure Body and Divine Blood of Christ. Those who grieve are consoled. Those ravaged by the devil have been – and continue to be – delivered.

What, then, O, brethren, is required of us in order that we might avail ourselves of all the grace brought unto us from on high by the coming to earth of the Son of God?

What is necessary, first of all, is faith in the Son of God, in the Gospel as the salvation-bestowing heavenly teaching; a true repentance of sins and the correction of life and of heart; communion in prayer and in the mysteries [sacraments]; the knowledge and fulfillment of Christ's commandments. Also necessary are the virtues: Christian humility, alms-giving, continence, purity and chastity, simplicity and goodness of heart.

Let us, then, O brothers and sisters, bring these virtues as a gift to the One Who was born for the sake of our salvation – let us bring them in place of the gold, frankincense and myrrh which the Magi brought Him, as to One Who is King, God, and Man, come to die for us. This, from us, shall be the most-pleasing form of sacrifice to God and to the Infant Jesus Christ. AMEN.