

# KOINONIA: A Publication of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

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## PREACHING THE NATIVITY by Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

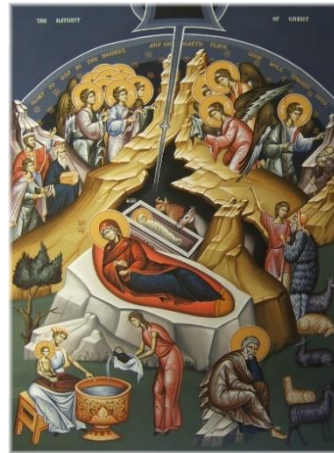
*“The Church now calls us to meet Christ Who comes from heaven.”*

St. John of San Francisco  
Nativity Epistle of 1962

### Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Very often, we think of the Feasts and celebrations of the Church as something that happened “back then”. We consign them to history and believe that when we are at services, we are simply just remembering an ancient event.

But the truth, the eschatological reality, is that the Feasts are happening *right now*. When we attend the services we are not just remembering: we are *participating* ... here and now. The services are not a nostalgic glimpse into the past. Rather, the services stand us in the very same place where the events of the holy days happened, witnessing the story of our salvation unfold for us. Indeed, the Eucharist itself is not something we



remember as history, but it is the Body and Blood of Christ present in this very moment! The same is true for every service we celebrate ... we participate right now and we witness to Christ’s birth right now.

So, when we come to the Feast of the Nativity, we are not merely pondering a distant moment that happened 2,000 years ago in a remote cave in Bethlehem. We are standing in the cave before the Christ Child! We are rejoicing with His Mother, His foster father Joseph, the shepherds and the angels! We must witness to that reality before a world that has relegated the Feast to just another “happy holiday”.

As Fr. Thomas Hopko wrote in *The Winter Pascha*, “The world today urgently needs divine celebration. And so do many Christians and Christian churches.”

When we celebrate the birth of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, we are standing in His presence! That fact should have a profound impact on our communities. It needs to resonate in our souls as we worship Christ and hymn His Birth.

So let us hasten to witness to the Christ Child so that all may come to worship Him who gives us life. Let us stand in awe before the Cave, and let us *share* with all the Divine Mystery of love that unfolds there, the love of a God Who is here with us now and forever.



The Place of Christ’s Birth,  
Basilica of the Nativity, Bethlehem

## Let Us Celebrate, O People!

*“The world today urgently needs divine celebration. And so do many Christians and Christian churches.”*

Let us celebrate, O people! But let us celebrate properly. Let us go up to Bethlehem, and not into the houses of others. Let us lift up our minds to the Lord, and not let them stray into the lives of our neighbors. Let us concentrate on God and rejoice in His mercy and love for the world, even the “secularized” and the “commercialized” world where the devil reigns. Let us not ruin the festival for ourselves and for our loved ones because of what others are doing or not doing. Let us strive to “keep Christ in Christmas” for ourselves first of all, by

keeping Christ in ourselves and ourselves in Christ. Then Christmas will be the God-given celebration which it is, the celebration of God’s Coming in the person of His Son. Only in this way will our celebration be pleasing to the Lord, fulfilling for ourselves, and inspiring to others. For it will then be a living testimony to what a celebration really is – when it is what God made it to be.

The world today urgently needs divine celebration. And so do many Christians and Christian Churches. For while some

are having fun, and others are condemning them for doing so, neither the one nor the other is really joyful and at peace. For no one can be satisfied without the presence of the merciful God Who loves His creatures and comes to heal and forgive them their foolishness and sin. And no celebration is truly satisfying without God’s compassionate presence of love.

*Excerpt from Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko’s “Let Us Celebrate, O People!” From **The Winter Pascha** SVS Press (Crestwood, NY: 1984., pp. 76-79.*

## On the Night of Nativity

*“The present day has opened the door of heaven to our prayers; let us also open our door to those who ask of us forgiveness!”*

Pure is the present night, in which the Pure One appeared, Who came to purify us! Let our hearing be pure, and the sight of our eyes chaste, and the feeling of the heart holy, and the speech of the mouth sincere!

The present night is the night of reconciliation; therefore, let no one be angry against his brother and offend him!

This night gave peace to the whole world, so, let no one threaten. This is the night of the Most-Meek One; let no one be cruel!

This is the night of the Humble One; let no one be proud!

Now is the day of joy; let us not take revenge for offences! Now is the day of good will; let us not be harsh. On this day of tranquility, let us not become agitated by anger!

Today God came unto sinners; let not the righteous exalt himself over sinners!

Today the Most-Rich One became poor for our sake; let the rich man invite the poor to his table!

Today we received a gift which we did not ask for; let us bestow alms to those who cry out to us and beg!

The present day has opened the door of heaven to our prayers; let us also open our door to those who ask of us forgiveness!

Today the Godhead placed upon Himself the seal of humanity, and humanity has been adorned with the seal of the Godhead!

*St. Ephraim the Syrian “Hymns on the Nativity”, [On the Night of Nativity – St. Ephraim the Syrian, Online \(www.orthodox.net\)](http://www.orthodox.net)*

## From the Fathers: “Nativity Epistle of 1962” by St. John of San Francisco

*“Thou, Who art the God of peace and the Father of compassions, didst send unto us the Angel of Thy great Counsel, granting us peace.”*

The Angel-Messenger of the pre-eternal Counsel of the Holy Trinity comes to the earth. This is not an ordinary messenger; it is the Only-begotten Son of God Himself. He brings peace to men.

“Peace be unto you,” He said more than once to His disciples. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you,” He says to the apostles at the Mystical Supper, “not as the world giveth, give I unto you.” And appearing after His Resurrection, again He says: “Peace be unto you.”

“For He is our peace,” the holy Apostle Paul says concerning Him: “He came to the earth to reconcile man unto God by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. And having come, He preached peace to those afar off and to those near, because through Him we both have access unto the Father.”

The wall that separated heaven and earth is destroyed; the sword that barred the way to the tree of life disappears. Unto man that had sinned comes his Creator, calling him into His embrace! By the mouths of the apostles, the Holy Spirit cries out: “In Christ, be ye

reconciled to God.” You that had sinned came not to God; but the Son of God, before Whom you sinned, came to you!

He calls everyone to Himself; He gives forgiveness to everyone who merely thirsts for this. For without the desire of man himself, without at least his little effort, God’s peace cannot settle in him.

The Lord forces no one to come to Him, but calls everyone: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Come all ye who are heavy laden with sins, who are exhausted from your labors and who do not find rest! You shall find that inner peace, which you will find nothing on earth more desirable than. The soul will feel unearthly peace and joy.

The Magi who worshipped the Babe experienced that joy; the shepherds, finding Him lying in a manger, also felt it. But neither peace nor joy touched the heart of Herod and those who wanted to destroy the Babe. For evil desire and malice are incompatible with inner peace. And whoever does not have inner peace, also sows strife and malice about.

The Church now calls us to meet Christ Who comes from heaven. What can we do in order to meet Him like the Magi, and not like Herod? “Ye that desire life, keep your tongue from evil

and your lips from speaking guile. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”

It tends to be hard to do this; we are weak when it comes to everything good. But the Son of God even came for this: in order to strengthen us. Not for naught was He born in Bethlehem, which signifies “house of bread.” He feeds us with heavenly food, His flesh. “God, the Lord and Creator of all, as a babe in the flesh, is worshipped in a poor manger, crying out: eat My Body and through faith be made steadfast.”

These words of the divine Babe are directed to us. Let us hearken to His call! Let us follow the Magi; let us hasten with the shepherds! Our churches are now that cave of Bethlehem. Not illusory, but in reality does He, Who is now being born in His most pure flesh, rest in them.

Let us worship Him; let us offer as a gift our thoughts and desires; let us confess our sins, and let us taste of His immaculate Body and Blood. Whoever did not do this earlier, let him at least accomplish it now, when the star of Bethlehem is already shining! Our minds will be enlightened and the heart will hear:

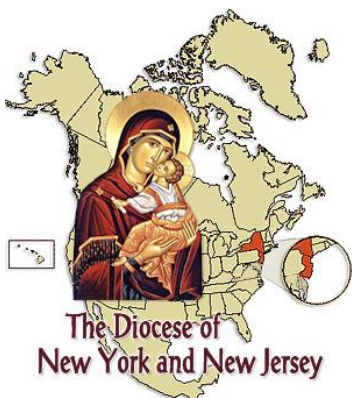
*“Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will among men!”*

St. John of San Francisco,  
“Nativity Epistle of 1962”,  
[ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY  
THEN AND NOW, Online,  
\(www.johnsanidopoulos.com\)](http://www.orthodoxchristianitythenandnow.com)



*“Let us hearken to His call! Let us follow the Magi; let us hasten with the shepherds! Our churches are now that cave of Bethlehem.”*





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## One Year In!

By Fr. Paul Fedoroff, St. Olympia Mission, Potsdam, NY

### What a difference a year makes!

If you haven't heard any updates on our mission lately, then you will be happy to know that we have settled into our "new" building.

This time last year we were anticipating that we would soon be getting into our new place, and now we have been there for almost a year. A journey that began with us feeling like we were invading a protestant church space has now turned into the joy and task of caring for and operating an Orthodox Church. We plan to keep moving forward as best we can, reaching out to the local community and serving our neighbors in the North Country.

Bringing Orthodoxy to the North Country truly means providing the right way to worship our God. It is up to all of us who are Orthodox to show those around us how to be faithful Christians. The upcoming Feast of the Nativity of our Lord is a prime example.

It is probably not a shock to hear that much of our culture is oriented "backwards". How does your average American



"prepare" for the Feast of the Nativity? How many "holiday" parties do we attend? How much feasting happens during the "holiday season" leading up to the holy day? Our culture falls further and further from true worship of our Lord.

Being an Orthodox Christian means that we celebrate the correct holiday season which is the day of the Feast and the several days that follow. We are to prepare for the feast by fasting. Too often, people feast up until Christmas, then the next day we look for ways to shed pounds, almost glad that it is now all over! Instead, our Faith says to tighten our belts over the forty days leading up to the Nativity, then truly feast for 12 days!

I encourage all of you to *go to church* as often as you can, especially this season. That might sound obvious, but we are now living in the world of *virtual* options. This timely word, "virtual," means "almost or nearly as described, but not completely or according to strict definition."

Just as Christ *actually* came in the flesh, we must *actually* gather in the flesh! The Church is Christ's Body in reality – not virtually. Just as God gave us the face of His Son to behold, we must look to our fellow man and see the face of God.

I wish you all a joyous celebration in the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To support St. Olympia Mission, please visit online: [saintolympiaorthodoxchurch.org](http://saintolympiaorthodoxchurch.org)