

Dearly beloved: Christ is among us!

Today we continue to rejoice in the birth of the Mother of God, a feast we began to celebrate on Thursday. We honor her because of her special place in our salvation. She is the one who is the Gate of Heaven, the Temple of the Lord from whom the Son of God took flesh that He may dwell among us and bring us salvation by His life, death and resurrection. The whole of our salvation came to hang upon the “yes” or “no” of a teenage girl over twenty centuries ago. God so humbled Himself that He would not create for Himself a human nature but rather lowered Himself to take flesh from another human, Mary, so that He may be truly human. And He did not compel her to do so. Rather, God waited for Mary’s answer to His plan of salvation for us. This is why we honor her above any angels or saints, because it is she who by her “yes” to God, by her words to the archangel, “Let it be done unto me according to your word”, that the Son of God could come to us as one of us, to live with us, to show us the way to salvation, and to die for our sake that He may raise us up with Himself in the resurrection. We honor her in all the moments of her life: her conception in the womb of Anna (December 9), her birth (September 8), her entrance into the Temple as a three-year old girl (November 21), her Annunciation (March 25), her death and resurrection (August 15) as well as other feasts throughout the year.

Today we stand between feasts, still celebrating Mary’s birth but also preparing to celebrate the feast of the Cross of the Lord (September 14). We sing “Your Nativity, O Virgin, / Has proclaimed joy to the whole universe! / The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, / Has shone from You, O Theotokos! / By annulling the curse, / He bestowed a blessing. / By destroying death, He has granted us eternal Life.” So in celebrating the birth of the Mother of God we already are looking to Christ Jesus Who annulled the curse of the sin of our first parents and destroyed death by His own death upon the Cross granting us life with Him in eternity.

Jesus speaks to us today of why He became incarnate of the Theotokos, telling us that the Father “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” (John 3:16-17) It is the Father’s love, His love for us who are sinners, that caused Him to send the Son into the world through the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary. “The words, God so loved the world, shows intensity of love. For great is the distance between God and the world. He who is without end or beginning, loved creatures laden with innumerable sins (us humans). What springs from this love shows its vastness. For God gave not a servant, or an Angel, or an Archangel, but His Son. Had He had many sons, and given one, this would have been a very great gift; but now He has given His Only Begotten Son.” (St. John Chrysostom)

That God has done all things for the love of us is so fundamental that Saint John Chrysostom included these words in the Liturgy, “Master...Who hast so loved Thy world as to give Thine only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom) The Son of God comes to live among us not to condemn us but that we might have life in Him. We are reminded at almost every service that “there are two comings of Christ; one past, the other to come. His first coming was not to judge but to pardon us, the second coming will be not to pardon but to judge us.” (Saint John Chrysostom) So we pray that we may be able to give a good account at His fearful judgment seat, showing Him lives of repentance, love and humility. If we are to give that good account to Him we, “as

far as humanly possible, are to imitate Christ in word, deed, and thought.” (Saint John the Sinaite) We are to imitate His love which did not turn away from even crucifixion, death upon a cross, in order that He might save us.

One of the saints gives us images of how our love imitates the love of the Crucified One for us saying,

“Love never hates anyone,

never reproves anyone,

never condemns anyone,

never grieves anyone,

never abhors anyone,

neither faithful nor infidel nor stranger nor sinner nor fornicator, nor anyone impure,

but instead it is precisely sinners, and weak and negligent souls that it loves more, and feels

pain for them and grieves and laments, and it feels sympathy for the wicked and sinners, more

than for the good, imitating Christ Who called sinners, and ate and drank with them. For this

reason, showing what real love is, He taught saying, ‘Become good and merciful like your Father

in Heaven,’ and as He rains on bad and good and makes the sun to rise on just and unjust alike,

so also is the one who has real love, and has compassion and prays for all.” (Saint Ammonas)