

Dear sisters and brothers: Christ is among us!

There's great interest certainly in America about our ancestry. We see and hear ads for various ancestry companies that will help us piece together our family tree. Who we are, where we are in our family tree, who our ancestors are, where they came from, what they did for a living. Like a tree our ancestry fits us in as a branch among the many branches of our family.

This was important for two of the evangelists, St. Luke and St. Matthew, whose gospel we have heard today. It wasn't their own ancestry but that of Jesus. It is important to show Jesus Jewish ancestry to show that God the Father is faithful to His promise to send a Messiah, an Anointed One, the Christ from the people of Israel to bring deliverance to all the nations. So St. Matthew painstakingly recounts the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ. God promised that in Abraham all nations would find blessing. God promised that a Savior would come from Adam and Eve to defeat Satan and open the gates of Paradise. Today we hear as if for the first time the majesty of God's mercy and His fidelity to His promise. The Son of God takes flesh of the Virgin by the Holy Spirit. God Himself empties Himself to become one of us and count as His ancestors sinners all the way back to the beginning of creation. The Son of God enters our family tree, the family tree of all humanity but not as simply one other branch but as the very root and source of our life. He grafts Himself to our humanity with the express purpose of grafting us to His divinity by grace. He lowers Himself to be borne of fallen humanity that He may raise us up to the glory of His divinity. Jesus descends from a human family not to limit our access to Him, that only those who are related by blood to Him may find salvation. Rather, the Son of God comes to us in order to graft us onto Himself. He tells us that He is the vine and we are the branches. Where our genealogy shows us who belongs and who doesn't in our family tree, Jesus comes to us not to exclude but to graft us all onto Himself. This is what our baptism accomplishes. God works His grace that those who are unrelated by blood and ancestry become His own daughters and sons by the Holy Spirit and so, deeper than even the bonds of blood and ancestry, we are united as sisters and brothers to one another through Christ Jesus. We read on Pascha night, "as many as received Him (the Word of God), to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13) We who are born of the will of the flesh are born anew in Him Who comes to be born as one of us. We are born anew of the will of God because of the Son of God Who is born into our human nature. We are born again of water and the Holy Spirit in baptism, a new creation greater than our being born into the world because by the Spirit we become God's tabernacle, having within us God Who is revealed as we conform ourselves to our Baptism. Conform ourselves to Christ Jesus by struggling against the temptations that come from our fallen nature, from the fallen world, and from the devil. By prayer, fasting and almsgiving done in love the Spirit of God is revealed in us, shaping us and forming us into His very likeness by our working with Him.

We have six days to go before we celebrate the birth of the Son of God in the flesh. If we haven't put our best effort into prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we have the opportunity to do so. We have the opportunity so long as we have breath to enter more deeply into our vocation to live as daughters and sons of our heavenly Father Who sent to us His only Son to be born of the Virgin not only that He might enter our history, our family tree, but that we may enter His family as daughters and sons and so find the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit whose temples we now are and through Whom we will find life in God's kingdom which is come and which is yet to come in its fullness.