



HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH

THROUGH THE CROSS JOY HAS COME INTO ALL THE WORLD

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HOMILY ON THE SUNDAY AFTER NATIVITY

V. Rev. Paul Schellbach



In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Christ is Born!

I hope that everyone had a wonderful Christmas celebration. We continue to celebrate the joyous time of Christ's Nativity. At this time of year, it is usually a joyous time around the world. Christ's birth marks his incarnation

to the world. His birth brings peace, joy and hope to the whole world. We want to nurture and carry this peace, joy and hope all year round. We have celebrated Christ's Nativity now for over 2000 years. His Nativity, his life, his ministry, his death and then his glorious resurrection has brought the world tremendous peace, joy and hope in so many ways.

As we sing in our Christmas service, God is now with us! But we also know that God does not take away human free will. Since the time of Christ, we have seen many glorious things done in his name. However, we have seen much evil in the world that still exists to this day. We need only to read the paper or turn on the TV to see the sorrows of the world. We read, see and hear about continual wars, battles, sickness and suffering. How do we reconcile these two realities of great joy and great suffering in the world?

Christmas is a time of great joy and celebration. We have a deep longing to embrace each other with a love in a way that Christ loves us. God gives us the gift of His Son to carry out His mission of transformation and redemption. During the Christmas season, we spend time with family and enjoy their company. We enjoy a sense of the fullness and a sense of love that lacks nothing.

Now, perhaps the great challenge of Christmas time is to carry that wonderful sense of joy and love and fullness throughout the whole year. The Christmas season protects us and wraps us with Christ's love. But do we carry the gifts of Christmas all year round? Or are the gifts of Christmas spent after a few joyous days of celebration?

At Christmas time Christ is born bringing his love and light. But, even at Christ's birth we are given hints that his full ministry will embrace suffering as well. At Christ's birth, the Son of God was not recognized by the world, he remained hidden. It was in the pitch of dark that the star of Bethlehem shone to the shepherds and the wise men. It was in a traveler's inn and not an expensive suite that Mary and Joseph had to be housed. It was in a manger, not a posh luxury crib, that Christ was born. One of the three wise men brought to Jesus Frankincense. This may have been a foreshadowing of Christ's future suffering and death as it is a spice typically used for burial.

Our God who became incarnate is pure love for us. He is pure light for us. But we live in a fallen world. Not all of us use our will to the glory of God. Yet in the dark night of this fallen world he wants us to trust in him. With this season of Christ's Nativity, he begins his journey to the Cross, and to his embrace of suffering in this world. But even in this dark filled mission he will conquer death and resurrect.

Christ's mission of bringing the world love and light is not separated from his experience of suffering. For example, today Joseph and Mary carry Jesus in order to escape the madness of Herod who kills the innocents. He kills innocent boy infants in the hopes that he has killed a potential competitor for the crown, that is Herod's. Jesus Christ, the light of the world, in his very first days on this earth, also faces the darkness of this world. Yet Christ perseveres through all the dark challenges put before him.

In the world today, we encounter a lot of joy, light and

celebration. Yet we also encounter a lot of pain, suffering and death. This also was true just as the mothers of Ramah experienced. Today Jeremiah's prophecy comes true, "A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more".

Today is the veneration of the Holy Innocents. These are the young first-born male infants that King Herod ordered to be slaughtered. They are now venerated as saints and martyrs. Our church has icons depicting the slayed Holy Innocents. What greater sorrow is there in the fallen world than to lose a child? It is said, the mothers mourning in Ramah were truly heart broken. When Jesus died on the cross Mary, his mother, experienced the same sorrow that the mothers of Ramah went through.

God did not will the killing of the Holy Innocents. His coming to earth was not a sanction on evil. Christ just did not want to take away our free will. He wants us to use our free will to His glory. Herod's murdering of the innocents was horrendous. But Christ did not stop Herod from using his free will. And thousands of holy innocents suffered.

And so, brothers and sisters, it is like this today. We have the wonderful gift of our free will to use to God's glory. Yet we also live in a world in which humans abuse their free will to the point of having others suffer terribly. Free will is very often used to the good but it is often also used to the bad. Terrible things happen at the hand of free will: murder, torture, abandonment, neglect, physical abuse and emotional abuse just to name some of the things that happen in this world of ours.

In precisely in this fallen world of ours God is born. He brings his life, light and love to make even a better world. He is our ultimate guiding light in how we are supposed to use our free will. Jesus's love and trust in His own Father in heaven becomes our model to love and trust in Jesus. God remains love, light, and life. He only seeks our

good and salvation. His life of love and light remains our lighthouse of guidance to know how to handle our own free will. In the use of our own free will he wants us to trust in him.

Christ reveals to us in His Incarnation that He is light and life. Now Joseph is faced with a challenge to believe in Him. He is warned in a dream to escape to Egypt. This is so Christ does not immediately face the fate of a horrible slaughter as the holy innocents went through. Christ's mission was only starting on earth. Joseph becomes a main player in allowing Jesus to live and grow in safety.

Christ's mission of bringing his love and light to the world was now also being tinged even at this early age with the effects of a fallen world. Due to Herod's evil ways, the family was not able to stay in Bethlehem.

So, Joseph moves his family to Egypt. As a little infant, Jesus now experiences, with Joseph and Mary the hazards of being a refugee family. It's as if Jesus spares himself no amount of suffering and humiliation. He remains God's son, one of the Holy Trinity. With all his suffering Jesus remains for us the way, the truth and the life.

Today, one of the saints being celebrated is Joseph. Joseph was able to trust in God and listen to God's angel. While it was probably not pleasant for him to travel to the land of Egypt he did so anyway. He trusted in God's angel. He received the peace and hope of doing God's will. And he spared the holy family of any danger at the hands of Herod.

We too, need to be like Joseph. We may not always feel so comfortable in sacrificing some earthly comforts, but like Joseph the greater picture was trusting in God. God's angel was with Joseph when he left Egypt to keep his family safe.

Joseph trusted in God to leave Bethlehem to journey to Egypt. This move from Bethlehem probably involved some suffering that any refugee is able to suffer. So, per-



haps there is something greater than suffering. This is trust in God. This is what Joseph had to do when the angel of the Lord said to him, "Take the young child and his mother and flee to Egypt and stay there until I bring you word. For Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." So, Joseph fled to Egypt with Jesus and the Theotokos and he was directed to stay there until Herod died.

Like Joseph who fled to Egypt, a waste land, a desert, this is when he precisely had to trust in God. His faith had to deepen to trust in God. Think about all that Joseph had on his mind when the angel of the Lord told him to flee to Egypt. He cared for Mary and Jesus with minimal belongings. He had to stay in Egypt with minimal material comforts. He had to stay there until an angel again came to him and said to him: "Arise, take the young child and his mother and go to the land of Israel for those who sought the young child's life are dead. And being warned by God in a dream he turned aside into the region of Galilee". This is where Joseph and Mary protected Jesus as he grew up and started his ministry.

We just celebrated the joyous nativity of our Lord and Savior. His glorious ministry on earth culminated in his suffering and death on the Cross. He endured much physical and psychological suffering. He also endured loneliness and abandonment. We hear His heart-breaking cry from the Cross: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" (Mt. 27:46 and Ps. 22:1). In this He showed us His vulnerability and suffering. He suffered because of evil and sin in the world that comes about because of the abuse of human free will.

So, let us conclude our thoughts today. Christmas time brings out our desires and hopes of a world filled with love, peace and joy. Let the January chill come but let the spirit of Christmas live on in us. Let Joseph's trust in God be our great model for us trusting in God. His sojourn to Egypt was like our January chill. But in trusting in God this January chill was tamed. Christmas time is not only the gift of Jesus but of the Holy Spirit. Joseph in his trust of God grows in that gift of the Holy Spirit in his descent

to Egypt. Our own descent into the winter chill does not have to be void of God. Trust in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the season of the Nativity, we know that God brings great love and light to the world. We also know that the fallen world lurks right outside. So, are we able to cling to God even more and trust in him that all things will work in Him? God does not erase human suffering. Like Joseph who endured an exile to Egypt this brought him a closer relationship to God. If we suffer how are we able to see God's hand in it? The God of Israel is the God of our free will. In our quest to come close to God we grow our trust in him. When we look at Christmas time, who doesn't like the merriment of the whole season. Today we carry this Christmas joy into that chilly January night.



Let me end my thoughts about how that spirit of a January chill was infused with the spirit of Christmas. There's a story that during WW I on Christmas Eve 1914 both sides stopped hostilities. They came together to have a light celebration to sing popular songs and play games. It was an unofficial truce where British, French and German soldiers left the trenches. They exchanged Christmas greetings and spoke about their homes and family. They also exchanged food and personal items from one another. It was a time to bury comrades and exchange prisoners. A game of soccer is an iconic moment of the truce seen in movies and photos. The Christmas truce lasted for about a week and fighting continued until 1918.

Like those troops are we able to foster that Christmas spirit amid a harsh and cold night. This Christmas season let your heart give way to Christ's presence, his love, light and life. Christ is our true gift for the season and all year round, including the chill of the night. Trust in Him. Think about this gift of trust in Christ. The gift of the Christmas season is the gift of trust in Him even in the face of suffering. Amen.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Moleben on our property: We will continue serving a weekly short prayer service on our property in Kernersville. This is a service of supplication (Molieben) that Archbishop Dimitri of blessed memory blessed for the use of parishes in the diocese. Fr. Christopher will be serving it on Friday mornings at 10 AM except where noted in the calendar. Our property is located at 1320 Masten Drive in Kernersville.

Sisterhood of the Holy Myrrhbearers: The Sisterhood will meet at 6:30PM on Tuesday, January 15.

Order Gift Cards Through Holy Cross! Scrip cards are available from hundreds of retailers and don't cost any more than the face value of the gift card. It's a "free" fundraiser to benefit the Holy Cross building fund! Contact Karen Brudnak-Slate.



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

December	Actual	Budgeted
Income	\$17,544.14	\$12,516.00
Expense	\$12,875.55	\$10,153.68

Year End	Actual	Budgeted
Income	\$150,602.09	\$150,190.00
Expense	\$121,763.42	\$127,192.76

Two years ago, we had a little over \$700,000 pledged for our capital campaign. From additional fundraising, donations that did not originate from pledges, and continued sacrificial giving by many parishioners, we expect to have actually collected approximately \$912,685 in accounts that we can use for construction and facilities by the end of January. Glory to God!



HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4 10 AM Prayers at the Property	5 3PM OCAT Cooking at Ronald McDonald House 6 PM Great Vespers
6 THEOPHANY 9:00AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 11:30AM Outdoor Blessing of the Waters 6:30 PM OCAT home meeting	7	8	9 6:30PM Inquir- ers' Class	10	11 10AM Prayers at the Property	12 6 PM Great Vespers
13 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	14	15 6:30PM Sister- hood	16	17	18 NO Prayers at the Property	19 6 PM Great Vespers
20 9:00 AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	21	22	23	24	25 NO Prayers at the Property 5PM Open Door	26 6 PM Great Vespers
27 9:00 AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	28	29	30	31	1 February 6:30PM Great Vespers	2 MEETING of Christ in the Temple 9 AM Divine Liturgy 6 PM Great Vespers

