



“Christ is born; glorify him!”

‘Christ is born; glorify him. Christ is from heaven; go and meet him. Christ is on earth; be exalted. O All the earth, sing unto the Lord.’ With these words St Gregory Nazianzen (4th c) began his Christmas homily, and they have been a part of the Orthodox Nativity service ever since. But what is the significance of the Nativity of Christ for Christians? How can we receive Christ, who descends to us? How can we ascend from earth to heaven? How can we glorify Christ with all our life?

Many monotheistic religions promise to bring humans nearer to God in order that they may experience a certain degree of closeness and intimacy with him. But no religion other than Christianity aims at enabling humans to know God as a friend, as a brother. As St Symeon the New Theologian (11th c) expressed it, through the Incarnation of the Lord we become sons of God the Father and brothers of Christ. God became incarnate in order to communicate with a human person as his equal. Having shared our destiny and our human life, Christ earned the right to pronounce the last truth about himself and about us, a truth that could not be revealed in any other way. This truth teaches us that there is no chasm separating God and humans; there are no insurmountable obstacles to the encounter of God with a human person one to one, face to face.

This meeting takes place in our heart. To make it possible, God came to earth, became man and lived a human life. He was born in a manger in Bethlehem, escaped to Egypt, returned to Nazareth, was raised in a carpenter’s home, was baptized, went out to preach as he walked through Galilee, Samaria and Judah proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven and healing human illness. He also underwent suffering and death on the cross, was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. All this was done with one sole purpose: to make possible that mysterious encounter, to destroy the barrier between humans and God erected by human sin.

The greatest mystery of the Incarnation is that, having happened once in history, it recurs in every person that comes to Christ. In the deep silence of the night the Word of God became incarnate on earth: this is how the Word becomes incarnate in the silent depths of our soul, where our mind lapses into silence, where words run out, where our spirit stands before God. Christ was born on

earth unknown and unrecognised, for only the magi and the shepherds went out to meet him. In the same way, quietly and unrecognisably to others, Christ is born in a human soul, and it comes out to meet him, because a star has been born in it, leading to the light.

We mysteriously recognise Christ in us during prayer, when we discover that our prayer has been accepted and heard, that God 'came and abode in us' and filled us with his life-bearing presence. We encounter Christ in the Eucharist, when, having received his body and blood, we feel that our own body is penetrated by his divine energy, and the blood of God runs through our veins. We encounter Christ in other sacraments of the Church, when through contiguity with him we are renewed and revived unto eternal life. We encounter Christ in our neighbours, when we gain sight of his innermost depth where the image of God shines. We encounter Christ in our everyday life, when amidst its noise we hear his beckoning voice or when we see his manifest intrusion into the course of history.

Precisely so - unexpectedly and suddenly - God intruded into the life of humanity twenty centuries ago, when by his birth he turned the course of history. Precisely so is he born again and again in the souls of thousands of people, changing, transforming and transfiguring their lives, making believers out of non-believers, saints out of sinners, saved out of dying.

When, around two thousand years ago, the Divine Infant was born, the angels sang: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men' (Lk 2:14). In our days the world yearns for peace and good will. In the very place where Christ was born there is war, and Bethlehem itself is under siege. The Christian Church prays for peace in the Holy Land and in other countries for the forces of good to triumph over the forces of evil.

May the Divine Child born in Bethlehem grant peace to the entire world, and good will to all its people.

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