

NATIVITY MEDITATION IV

“What mysteries beyond mind and speech! God in His compassion is born on earth, putting on the form of a servant that He may snatch from servitude to the enemy those who with fervent love cry out: Blessed art Thou, O Savior, who loves humankind” (Matins of the Pre-feast of the Nativity of the Lord)

Why did God become a man? Why did He take on the weakness of our human nature? What was the true purpose of the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity?

The answer to those questions reveals the fundamental mystery of our salvation; the “mystery of mysteries” which we ponder as we prepare for the celebration of our Lord’s birth in the flesh.

Over and over again the answer is given: because He loves us, because it is His will to save us from our oppressor, from the malice of the enemy who has enslaved us to fear, to sin, to death.

The surpassingly beautiful hymns of the Christmas services proclaim over and over again the mystery of Love Incarnate.

“The holy sayings of the Prophets have been fulfilled in the city of Bethlehem within a cave. The whole creation is made rich: let it rejoice and be of good cheer. The Master of all has come to live with His servants, and from the bondage of the enemy He delivers us who were made subject to corruption. In swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, He is made manifest a young Child, the pre-eternal God.”

Not only does He come for the sake of lost humanity, but, “the whole creation is made rich”! The very cave in which He is born is sanctified, the lowly beasts are witnesses to the unfathomable compassion of the Lord of All the Worlds!

Orthodoxy has never forgotten the words of St. Paul in Romans chapter eight where we are told that the whole creation has waited expectantly for the revelation of the Son of God, for the healing of the whole universe, which had been subjected to futility and suffering on account of the rebellion, first of the angels and, through temptation, humankind.

What beauty! What a sublime and lovely revelation of God's mercy and compassion! He comes for the sake of all—no one, no thing, is excluded!

“Let the creation now cast off all things old, beholding You the Creator made a child. For through Your birth You shape all things afresh, making them new once more and leading them back again to their first beauty.”

Here are echoes of the hymns which we sing in Great Lent, reminding us of the “rustling leaves of Paradise” which we lost through disobedience. Now they are spiritually restored to us, now the whole creation is put back on the road to salvation—to its original beauty.

“Behold, the Most Holy Word comes unto His own in a holy Body By a strange birth He makes His own the world that was estranged. To Him let us sing in praise, who became poor for us.”

What is the purpose for His coming? Why did God become a man?

To put an end to alienation and estrangement, to reconcile, to heal, to redeem, to undo the curse of separation.

“Let the kings of the whole earth sing rejoicing, and let the companies of the nations be exceedingly joyful. Mountains, hills and hollows, rivers and seas, and the whole creation magnify the Lord who now is born!”

The world is no longer separated into hostile ethnic groups, no longer subject to the caprice of fallen nature, because we recognize the “new creation” which is being established mysteriously in our midst—the Church! The wise men from Persia and the Chosen nation, Israel, come together to witness the birth of the Savior. The stars bear witness, the earth offers a cave, the lowly beasts offer their warmth, the human race offers our flesh through the Virgin mother. The old divisions are overcome! Who can fully comprehend this mystery?

“What shall we offer Thee, O Christ, who for our sakes has appeared on earth as man? Every creature made by Thee offers Thee thanks. The angels offer Thee a hymn; the heavens a star; the Magi, gifts; the shepherds, their wonder; the earth, its cave; the wilderness, the manger: and we offer Thee a Virgin Mother, O pre-eternal God, have mercy on us!”

Look as hard as you will in the hymns that proclaim the Lord’s birth, look as hard as you will in the Scriptures that record His coming among us and you will find no other message than that of liberation from darkness and perversion. You will discover no other reality than the joyful response of God’s creation to His infinite Love and Mercy. There is no wrath, no anger, no talk of judgment (except for the judgment laid against the enemy who corrupted us--and against those, like Herod, who consciously and knowingly reject Christ and attempt to destroy Him). There is only the gospel (good news) message of restored communion between God and His creation.

“Heaven and earth are united today, for Christ is born! Today God has come upon earth, and man has gone up to heaven. Today for man’s sake is seen in the flesh He Who by nature is invisible. Therefore let us also give glory and cry aloud to Him: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, which Thy coming has bestowed upon us, O Savior, glory to Thee!”

How beautiful this mystery! How infinitely gracious, our God! Who can possibly tell of all His mighty works? Who can fathom the depths of His compassion and love? How precious the Name of the one by Whom we are saved: Jesus, our Emmanuel (God-with-us)!