

**ARCHPASTORAL MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE
METROPOLITAN TIKHON
NATIVITY OF CHRIST 2017
CHRIST IS BORN ! GLORIFY HIM !**

To the Honorable Clergy, Venerable Monastics, and Pious Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

My beloved Brethren and Blessed Children in the Lord,

As we come to the end of the civil year, we reflect back on a period in which tragedy, acts of terrorism, shootings in public spaces, political confusion, and sexual misconduct allegations dominate the news. The darkness which enshrouds the world adds to the burden of our personal and family struggles: addictions, estrangement, divorce and all manner of conflict wrought by human passions. We might be tempted to wonder how love could have so definitively fled from the hearts of human beings.

The feast of the Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ is a reminder to all of us that "heaven and earth today make glad prophetically" and angels and men "keep spiritual feast for God, born of a woman, has appeared in the flesh to those that sit in darkness and shadow." The light that we receive today is not merely a physical light that pierces the gloom which surrounds us, but rather a transfiguring light that both reveals God's love for us and inspires us to grow in our love for God.

There is no philosophy or ideology that can overcome the irrationality of the world. It is only the transfiguring light of Christ – His divine and sacrificial love – that can accomplish this. It is only through love that we can, with the animals and the manger, "accept Him who by His Word has loosed us dwellers on earth from acts that are against reason." When we despair at the tragedies in the world and in our lives, let us remember that it is precisely in the midst of such darkness that the Word of God chose to be incarnate.

Archimandrite Zacharias suggests that: "When we are confronted by the ruins of human love and find ourselves completely broken, then two solutions can be given: either we turn to God with our pain, so that God enters our life and renews us, or we continue to be deceived by our human plans and slide from one tragedy and barrenness of soul to another, hoping that one day we will find perfection."

The world longs for authentic love but seems to remain mired in the global tragedies that we witness every day. In our horizontal and human relations with one another, what is missing is God Himself, a third and divine-human Person to purify and heal our imperfect and broken relationships. Whether it be husband and wife, brother and sister, or larger communities, true love and abiding peace can only be found through our communion with God.

In our Orthodox context, this takes place through the Divine Liturgy and through our efforts to nurture the sacrificial love of God in our own hearts. "Paradise begins on earth through love for God and love for our fellows. In this lies the entire wealth of eternal life, for man has been created to give eternal glory to God. His delight is to return this glory to His image, man, who then returns greater glory to his Creator."

Today's feast is a reminder that it is through this cycle of glorification and love between God and man that we find our true fulfillment. May the new-born Christ grant us the courage to keep His love in our hearts, to connect with our fellows through prayer, sacrifice, and humility, and to remember that, no matter the degree of our own brokenness or the brokenness of the world, Christ has come to give us hope for renewal, "for what He was, He has remained, true God: and what He was not, He has taken upon Himself, becoming man through love for mankind."

With love in the New-Born Christ,



+ Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada