

## The Nativity of the Theotokos: First Light

by Fr. Lawrence Farley

When Mary of Nazareth first emerged from her mother as a newborn infant and uttered her first newborn cries, few then present could have had any inkling what that child would mean to human history. After an extended period of infertility and difficulty in conceiving, of course her parents were delighted—even if the child was a girl and not a boy. The social stigma of childlessness had been removed, and there was a precious new life to love and care for, someone to love and care for them in return in their advancing old age. But it is doubtful if anyone watching as the infant was wrapped in the customary swaddling clothes and placed at her mother's breast could guess her true significance. For that little girl represented the first light of a coming redemption and rescue.

People who have sat long throughout the night waiting for the sun to arise and fill the world with light and warmth rejoice when they see its first light. Even before the sun itself crests the horizon and is seen, one can still see the horizon gradually becoming lighter, illuminated by the coming dawn. That first light precedes the actual arrival of the sun with its piercing and blinding rays, and heralds its imminent presence. First light comes creeping over the world, and only after that comes the sun itself. Those who wait for the sun, rejoice in first light, for it means that their long wait is almost over.

The birth of little Mary was the world's first light as it sat waiting through the long night of sin and death. Girls in Palestine at that time were betrothed around the age of twelve or thirteen, and so Mary would have been about that age at the time of the Annunciation. That means that about fourteen years after Mary was born, Christ the Saviour would be born as well, the sun of righteousness coming over the horizon, arising with healing in His wings for the sick and weary world (Malachi 4:2). Young children might think that fourteen years is an eternity, but adults as they age realize that such a span of time passes more quickly than they could have imagined. And in the history of the world, such a span of time is a mere blink of the eye. That is why the Church celebrates the Nativity of the Theotokos, for it knows through historical hindsight what no one present at that birth could have guessed: the baby's newborn cries announced not only her birth, but the imminent birth of the Saviour as well.

That birth also reveals the ways of God, and shows us what He finds truly valuable. Humanly speaking, the little girl born that day did not have much going for her. She was a Jew in a Roman world, a female in a man's world, and a poor person in a world that valued riches above all else. She had no special education or status; she lived in a small undistinguished town not even mentioned in the Law and the Prophets, and she lived at a time when her

homeland was occupied by a tyrannical and hated foreign power. But she did have a holy and humble heart, a heart that beat towards God and proclaimed her to be His handmaid. And in the end, this was enough. God apparently thought that ethnicity, gender, riches, education, and power, however handy in some ways, were irrelevant to His saving purposes. He therefore chose her to be His special vessel, His instrument for entering human history and rescuing His world. Mary's humble status, combined with her crucial and exalted role in the history of salvation, reveal that that is all we need as well. Like her, we may not be powerful, rich, well-placed, or brilliant. But if we are humble and have a heart that beats for God, God can use us too. His strength is made perfect in weakness—even the weakness of a little baby girl born to an aged set of parents tucked away in Galilee and hiding from the harsh glare of history.

### John 3:13-17 (*Gospel, Sunday Before*)

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

### Matthew 22:1-14 (*Gospel*)

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."' But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

## IOCC Hurricane Con't

for two truckloads of hygiene kits, clean-up buckets, food and baby products to the Houston area, arriving early the week of 9/4/17. IOCC staff is checking in with every Orthodox parish in the region to assess clean-up and other needs. Parishioners who have specific clean-up needs are asked to speak to their parish priest, who will coordinate with IOCC.

How can you help?

- [Make a gift.](#)
- [Create clean up buckets.](#) Our supply of clean up buckets has been depleted at our warehouse, please consider creating clean up buckets and shipping to our warehouse for distribution. [Instructions on creating and shipping kits](#) are available on-line.
- [Sign up to volunteer](#) for clean-up efforts in the region. Houston-area volunteers will be of greatest help at the moment. Because we expect this to be a busy hurricane season, there will be additional opportunities for other volunteers.
- [Share our good work](#) by following us on our social media channels (IOCCRelief) and share how IOCC is responding to support people in need.

Established in 1992, IOCC is the official humanitarian agency of the [Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America](#). In 2017, IOCC celebrated its 25th year of global philanthropic outreach.

### 2 Corinthians 1:21-2:4 (Epistle)

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand. But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me? And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

## Thank you from Father David

To the Parish Family of Holy Assumption Church,

It was a real joy to see so many of you today when I had the opportunity to serve again at the Altar of Holy Assumption Church.

I am especially pleased that all of you could participate in my investiture with the Palitza for my years of service as an Orthodox priest. This particular dignity is both an honor and a reminder to the priest receiving it of the vocation and life commitment that he has made to share in the priesthood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. A priest does this to be the visible instrument of our Lord's actions bringing His Presence, His healing, His forgiveness, and His support to the local church. To be the instrument of that sharing is a High Honor and Dignity.

At the same time, this honor is best experienced when it is shared with those from the local church to which a priest has given a significant number of years, so that they too can share in the joy of the occasion and as an expression of thanksgiving for the times shared with their priest.

Thank you too, one and all, for the beautiful brunch you served today. As always, it was filled with your wonderful cooking and my only regret is that I could not have spent more time with you to enjoy it and catch up with each of you on all of the things that have happened with you since my departure. Perhaps at a later date when my Mom's health is improved, we will be able to share a longer visit.

I pray that as God blessed you with so successful a Halupki Festival, that He will continue to bless each of you and Father Andrew with a happy holiday season as this year begins to so quickly draw to a close.

God Bless all of you.

*Father David*

### Galatians 6:11-16 (Epistle, Sunday Before)

See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.