

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST
Matt. 2:1-12

By Archpriest Peter Olsen
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One night over two thousand years ago an extraordinary event took place. People the world over were going about their business much the same as they do today. One quiet evening, in a cave in a field where shepherds tended their flocks, the Son of God was born as a man into the world. He was born of a woman, and the same as every man who comes into the world, he had a Mother. But his Mother was a virgin and knew no man. The birth of Jesus was of the Holy Spirit. This incredible event went almost unnoticed by the rest of the world, but the result of His coming into the world would affect the entire human race like no other man ever could or would.

Why did God the Father send His only-begotten Son into the world? Because God loves us with a love that is incomparable to any love that can be encountered anywhere and at any time. When we love someone and he or she is suffering, we want to share in our beloved's suffering and, if possible, take their suffering upon ourselves in order to alleviate their pain. God sees our suffering, and He loves us so much, that the closest way that He could share in our suffering and in our fate was for His Son to become a man and partake of human life. We see in Holy Scripture that God was feared by people. People were terrorized when they thought that they were in the presence of God. They fell on their faces before Him in fear and trembling. Jesus brings an entirely new relationship between God and man. Instead of a fearsome power like thunder and lightning, God comes among men in the image of a small Child, whose Mother carried and nursed Him in her arms like thousands of other mothers tend to their infants. Whereas in the past God seemed remote and far away, now a path is opened to us to attain the closest possible contact and relationship imaginable with the Divine, with God Himself.

The Son of God came into a world that is filled with human evil, vice and sin. In addition, before this innocent Child was even born, this Child who would do no harm to anyone but only bring good, was already feared and hated by people such as Herod. Herod and his ilk wanted to destroy this Child, because their evil way of life and their evil deeds would be hindered by the presence of God in the world.

This conflict between God, who only brings goodness, light and life, and people who lead an evil way of life, continues even to today. In our times people still suffer at the hands of other people who are motivated by evil and sin. At this very moment there are many Christians who are being murdered just like the children in Bethlehem who were murdered at the instigation of Herod. But Christ is present in a special way in our fallen and sinful world — He is with everyone who is persecuted, suffering, and treated unjustly. We are comforted and strengthened by the actual presence of God in our lives, and we know that when things are bad with us and we feel abandoned and ostracized by people, we are not abandoned by God. And more than that, it is not only us who suffer, but the Son of God Himself suffered and died on the Cross.

The Lord did not come in order to bring us earthly pleasures, but in order to share in our grief and suffering. He came in order to help us not from some far away place but from the very core of our life. The angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will toward men" at the birth of our Savior. This did not mean that hatred would end immediately with the Lord coming into the world. We can encounter hatred every which way we turn in the world today. Jesus came in order to fill the life of every person with meaning, joy and happiness. The spiritual, internal joy that our newly Born Savior gives us is not dependent upon external circumstances. Even the martyrs who went to their death because of their faith in Christ, because they proclaimed the truth, felt God's presence and therefore with joy they surrendered their lives for His sake.

When we receive Holy Communion today, let us thank God with all our hearts that He became a man, that He lived and continues to live among us, and that He nourishes and fills all of us internally with His life-giving presence. Let us thank the Lord, because He transfigures our entire inner world and the entire exterior world, and because He leads each of us and everyone together to salvation. Amen.

