

SERMON - Nativity of our Lord, Divine Liturgy, Dec. 25, 2017

When I was a boy, Christmas was my favorite time of the year. I waited with anticipation all year for Christmas to come. My parents weren't wealthy, but I could select pretty much any toy that I wanted, and I would get it for Christmas. As Christmas approached, I was enthralled with all the decorations and multi-colored lights that were everywhere to be found. I grew up in NYC, and visiting the original Macy's department store on 34th Street in Manhattan was like stepping into a fantasy wonderland. It was like a Disney movie coming to life. We didn't have DVDs or VCRs, and you could only see movies and programs when they were shown on television. I couldn't wait for all of my favorite Christmas shows to play on television, because I only got to see them once a year. There were also musical Christmas specials for adults to enjoy; Bing Crosby, Andy Williams and others. I couldn't wait until Christmas morning to wake up and run to the Christmas tree to find my presents and tear them open. Then there was the trek to Long Island where all of my family gathered at my Aunt's house for a stupendous Christmas feast. The children all played board games and the adults would enjoy each other's company with avid conversation and some holiday cheer to warm the heart. My father is 94 years old, and my mother is 88. I know that I won't have my father with me forever, so I made a film documentary of him and asked him to reminisce about his life. One of his first and most vivid recollections was Christmas as a boy in Europe. My 94 year old father remembered and talked about culinary smells emanating on Christmas morning from his mother's kitchen, remembering them as if it were yesterday and not many years ago. Above all, I enjoyed the extreme joy and happiness and the coziness and warmth of family. There was no other time in the year like it. Christmas was the penultimate holiday of celebration and joy. Certainly this experience is not unique to me, but is the similar experience of countless children from the time the first Christmas tree was decorated until today.

As I got older and began to read, study and understand things more, I eventually realized that all that Christmas joy and celebration was a reflection of the joy of joys, the fact that our Savior Jesus Christ became a man and was born. One of my favorite quotes from Scripture is that Jesus came not to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17). The Lord is well aware of all our human weaknesses and failings. Just like our earthly parents, our heavenly Father grieves for us when we err and make bad choices. Just like our earthly parents, our heavenly Father wants to see us correct our failings and walk the path which will be for our well being and happiness. Walking uprightly on the road of our Lord is the only path to true happiness. I'm almost 60 years old, yet my 88 year old mother still thinks I am 12 years old and worries about me the same. If it is cold and rainy out, she asks if I have boots and tells me to dress warm. If I go on a journey, she frets until I call her and inform her that I've arrived safely at my destination. No matter how old we grow, our parents still love and view us as their children and ceaselessly worry and care about us. It is the same with our heavenly Father who loves and cares for us more than we will ever know.

On this great Feast of the Lord's Nativity, let us offer our gratitude for the many blessings we enjoy: the gift to live in a country of freedom and prosperity which allows us to enjoy and celebrate the Lord's Birth with family and friends, the gift to enjoy good health and the gift to have family and friends who love and care about us. Above all, let us give thanks that God has gifted us His only begotten Son, and through Him to gift us the forgiveness of sins and to offer us the greatest gift of all, the gift of eternal life. Christ is Born! Glorify Him!