

Rector's Letter, January, 2017

Dear brothers and sisters:

We have a dangerous habit of dividing the universe in two: this part belongs to us, and that part belongs to God. There is this life, which is exciting, full of concrete pleasures (and pains!); and then there is “the afterlife,” something rather misty and distant. God reigns far above us, with his angels and saints, but down here we have to adjust his commands to fit more ordinary and pressing demands. Heaven may be full of light, but we have to live among shadows.

The feast of Theophany on Jan. 6 shows us how very wrong this idea is. In reality, heaven is not far from us at all. St. John the Forerunner prepares the way of the Lord by preaching “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2), and after being baptized in the Jordan, our Lord Jesus Christ preached with exactly the same words (Matthew 4:17).

Heaven and earth, God and Man are united in the very body of Jesus Christ, and he has come to unite us to the same heavenly reality — now, in this life! That’s what repentance means for us, to turn back to the Lord to be made clean, forgiven, and healed. Because if the kingdom of heaven is at hand, then God is in our midst, and to refuse to turn back *toward* him is to choose to turn our back *on him!*

We can only imagine that God and his kingdom are distant if we blind ourselves to his appearance. “Theophany” means the appearance, the shining forth of God, and we hear, in the festal troparion, how

When you, O Lord, were baptized in the Jordan,
the worship of the Trinity was made manifest.
For the voice of the Father bore witness to you,
calling you his Beloved Son;
and the Spirit in the form of a dove
confirmed the truthfulness of His word.
O Christ our God, you have revealed yourself,
and have enlightened the world, glory to you!

Bethlehem and Nazareth, Jordan and Galilee: these are in some sense ordinary places where God appeared in the flesh. And since God has appeared, the light that shone from him makes those ordinary places extraordinary. For those “who have loved his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8), these are all signs of the nearness of the Day of the Lord, or windows letting the light shine on us from the kingdom of heaven.

We only have one life, and we can only belong to one kingdom. We are free to devote ourselves to other fleeting, shadowy concerns. Or we can live as those who love and look for signs of God’s appearing, now.

With love in Christ,

F. John S. Mosher

Around the Parish

Our sister in Christ **Valentina Woliver** fell **asleep in the Lord** last month. May her memory be eternal!

Thank you to everyone who worked faithfully to **prepare for the celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord**: cleaning and decorating the church, all the aspects of our Christmas flowers, our choir, our altar servers, and all the details attended to behind the scenes. May the Lord bless you.

New Year's Day is also a feast celebrated in our church: The Circumcision of the Lord, and the feast of St. Basil the Great. This day commemorates the eighth day from the Nativity of the Lord, when he was actually given the name "Jesus." The Church still has prayers for the Eighth Day of a child's birth, to name that child before God. Come celebrate the feast and pray for the new year—with our usual weekend services this particular year.

To close out the Christmas season, MaryAnn Sporcic is planning a **carol sing** for Sunday, Jan. 8, after Liturgy.

We begin January with the **Feast of the Theophany** ("manifestation as God") of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, on Jan. 6. We celebrate that, when our Lord was baptized in

the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descended upon him and the Father spoke to affirm to all that Jesus Christ was his Only-Begotten Son. Though in America it is overshadowed by Christmas, the Theophany is at least as important to us as Christmas. We will celebrate **Vespers and Liturgy of Theophany, with the Great Blessing of Water**, on Thursday, Jan. 5, at 6 PM.



With the Theophany and the Blessing of Water, we enter the **season of house blessings**. Our homes need this spiritual "spring cleaning" each year to free them from the remembrance of sin and fill them with the presence of the Holy Spirit. All that is required is that you prepare a list of the living and departed that you wish to commemorate, and set up a candle and bowl of holy water before an icon. (Fr. Joshua brings holy water, too, in case anyone needs more.) Please sign up for a time on the sheets provided at the candle desk, or contact Fr. Joshua if none of the times are convenient.

Our **Brotherhood** is planning to celebrate the installation of new officers on Sunday, Jan. 8. May God grant their members many years!

Please remember that, if severe weather conditions force **church service or event cancellations**, announcements will be posted on WFSB (channel 3) and WNBC/WVIT (channel 30), as well as on our own parish website: <www.sspeterpaul.org>.

Looking Further Ahead

The feast of **the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple** is Tuesday, Feb. 2. This is the day when our Lord Jesus Christ was brought into the temple as a forty-day-old child by his parents. There the Righteous Simeon testified that he saw the promised salvation of Israel fulfilled: “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation....” We sing his prayer of thanksgiving at every service of Vespers.

We will observe the Meeting of the Lord with Vespers & Liturgy at 6 PM on Wednesday, Feb. 1.

The Brotherhood of SS. Peter & Paul is sponsoring a luncheon for the men of the parish on Saturday, Feb. 4, at the Four Corners Restaurant. For more details, please see Andrew Bobik, Joe Uliase, or any member of the Brotherhood.

ARCHPASTORAL MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE METROPOLITAN TIKHON

FOR THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST 2016



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

My Beloved Brethren and Blessed Children in the Lord,

Christ is born! Glorify Him! In recent years, we have been increasingly invited to immerse ourselves in a multitude of “universes” as an alternative to our everyday lives. Most recently, yet another installment of the “Star Wars” universe was released, and surely there will be more to come, along with an endless array of similar cinematic worlds and virtual realities in the realms of sports, entertainment, the internet and in the media. While promising an escape from the mundane, such things often leave us

still trapped in our own world of earthly passions and desires.

Today, as we celebrate the Great Feast of the Nativity in the Flesh of Our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, we are invited to immerse ourselves, not into the world of escape, but into that “strange and glorious mystery” by which we are transfigured and transformed, embracing the Kingdom of heaven while allowing the Lord to embrace us. We are offered the possibility of encountering, not dazzling “heroes” of the three-dimensional, high definition sort, but rather the simple beauty of the birth of the child Jesus.

In appearance, aside from its extreme austerity, there is nothing externally noteworthy to behold: a woman gives birth in a cave and lays her child in a manger. But it is precisely through these simple realities that a great mystery—the pre-eternal God embracing our human nature in its fullness—is revealed to the universe. “He Who adorned the heavens with stars has been well-pleased to be born as a babe, and He Who holds all the ends of the earth in the hollow of His hands is laid in a manger of dumb beasts.”

This mystery becomes meaningful to us through the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church and through our small efforts to live with Christian kindness. This is far more than being virtuous. As Father Alexander Schmemmann wrote, “A kind person is kind because he or she accepts people as they are, covers them with kindness. Kindness is beautiful, the most

beautiful thing on this earth. Virtuous people are activists, obsessed with the desire to impose their principles and goodness and easily condemning, destroying, hating.... In this world there is a lot of virtue, and so little kindness.”

Virtue is not the goal, but rather a life of humility and a struggle to discern the Lord’s very image in everyone whom we encounter. He “Whom in essence none can touch” is wrapped as a mortal in swaddling clothes that we might become “partakers of His divine nature.” If there is any element of escape here, it is rooted in the turning away from sin and the all-too-deceptive seductiveness of this world.

The grace of the Holy Spirit is not given to us for virtue or heroic asceticism; rather, it is rooted in the humility that transforms us as surely as the Incarnation transforms the universe. “Let the creation now cast off all things old, beholding Thee, the Creator, made a child, for through Thy birth Thou dost shape all things afresh, making them new once more and leading them back again to their first beauty.”

May the joy of this great feast transfigure us now, in the New Year to come, and every day of our lives as we await the fullness of the Kingdom of heaven, yet to be fully revealed, but already fully present in the life of the Body of Christ, the Church.

With love in the New-Born Christ,
+ Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada