

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“I behold a new and wondrous mystery! My ears resound to the Shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn.

The Angels sing! The Archangels blend their voices in harmony!
The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise! The Seraphim exalt His glory!

All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised. Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolds within itself on every side the Sun of Justice.”

With these words, Saint John Chrysostom begins his “Homily on the Nativity of Christ.” As we continue our observance of the Nativity Fast in preparation for our celebration on December 25, we should take time, serious and dedicated time, to reflect upon what took place two millennia ago in that small village called Bethlehem. The Fast offers us the opportunity- and the challenge- to set aside worldly concerns, worries, and distractions, and place our focus on the purpose and meaning of this season.

On the night of the Lord's birth in the flesh, that tiny, backward town became the center of the universe, the focus of mankind's attention, and the place in which all human history was fulfilled. On the night of our Savior's birth, the shepherds stood in

wonder, the kings fell down in worship, the animals joined in the feast, the heavens shone forth in the brightness of the stars, and, as St John notes, the angelic ranks joined their voice in harmony and sang the glory of God. As we gather with our families, friends, and brothers and sisters in the Lord, what will our response be to the wonder and of the Savior's birth? How will we participate in this great mystery? How will we welcome the Lord who comes to save us? In what manner will our lives reflect our faith and our knowledge that the Lord Most High has lowered Himself and joined Himself to us as one of us?

During these next few weeks, as the world around us already celebrates a holiday season that seems to reflect a joy and spirit based upon worldly values and experiences, may our focus be on the One whose birth, life, death, and resurrection gives meaning to all things. May our fasting, prayers, and works of charity reflect our faith in the Lord Emmanuel, “God With Us.”

Be assured of my prayers for you and all your loved ones. May our Lord Jesus Christ, born in a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and placed in a manger, grant all of you health, happiness, and peace now and throughout the year to come.

With love in the Lord,

Father David