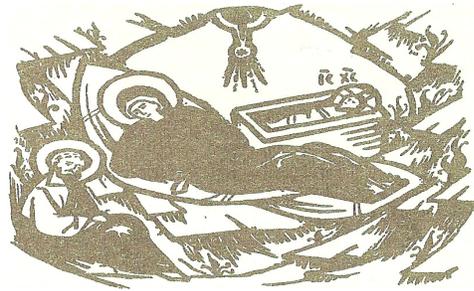


## The Real Gift of Christmas

*The Present of God's Presence!*



*Your Nativity, O Christ our God,  
has shown to the world the Light of Wisdom.  
For by it those who worshipped the  
stars were taught by a star to adore You, the  
Son of Righteousness and the Orient from on  
high. O Lord, glory to You!*

-- The Nativity Troparian

Jesus Christ "traveled" to our humanity. He took on our nature, accepting our poverty, weakness, trials and suffering. The way was hard, the distance infinite. Yet, on the feast of His Birth, we celebrate the mystery of divine love -- the coming of the One who suffers for our sake in order to save us.

### **How – Not if**

While some may ask if we celebrate Christmas, it is much more important to consider *how* we celebrate it.

How would you receive a very important guest who came at great difficulty and expense to help you in a time of need? You would *anticipate* and *prepare* for his arrival. You would go to meet your guest, welcome him with genuine warmth and excitement, and offer him your attention and your thanks.

This is how Christ should be received, not by emphasizing earthly preoccupations of food, drink, and neatly-wrapped presents, but by attending to and lavishing our gratitude on the heavenly God who comes to us offering the gift of divine love and presence in our lives.

The services for the feast of the Nativity, with their poetic proclamation of the Gospel in song opens our hearts and spirits to the Lord. We are invited to "go forth to meet Him, our hearts led with zeal and joy".

### **He shall come again in glory**

*When You first came to us, O Christ, You desired to save the race of Adam.*

*When you come again to judge us, Show mercy on those who honor Your holy birth.*

The birth of Christ has always been related to His Second Coming on the last day; the way we receive Him *now* will determine the way He will receive *us* on the final day.

Jesus Himself spoke of this: "As it was in Noah's day, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating and drinking, marrying wives and husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all... It will be the same when the day comes for the Son of Man to be revealed" (Luke 17:26-27,30). Our feasts and customs are no excuse for us to avoid keeping watch for the coming of the Savior; the vigilance we observe now is the vigilance with which we will welcome Him when He comes again in glory.

*He has opened the heavens and taken up abode in the Virgin!*

*He comes to be born in our flesh in Bethlehem's cave, as it is written.*

*He who gives life to children in the womb Himself becomes a child.*

*Let us go forth to meet Him with hearts filled with zeal and joy!*

The words of this hymn remind us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, truly came a long way to reach us. "His state was divine, yet He did not cling to His equality with God, but emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave and become as all humans are. And being as all humans are, He was humbler yet..." (Philippians 2:6-7) .

### **Our real hunger**

Christ is the food and drink that alone can satisfy our real hunger. On Christmas we receive Him not just *figuratively*, but *literally*. He is born in us and abides in us. He gives us the power to bear Him to a hungry and thirsty world. What greater thing can we do on this feast? What greater thing can there be for us than to prepare for and welcome our God who comes to us, radiant with humanity, meekness, and love?

*Who can understand the depth of God's wisdom and knowledge?*

*Who will fathom the endlessness of God's love for us?*

*He has opened the heavens and come down to live with us --*

*The Lord, whom all creation blesses and glorifies throughout all ages!*