



## Holy Ascension Russian Orthodox Church

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

*"Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim 3:16). For "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). The Son of God became the Son of a Virgin. Having two natures – Divine and human – the Son of the Living God, One of the Holy Trinity is now the bridge between the Godhead and man. Heaven and earth are united through the Virgin. The uncreated is united with the created, as the Only-Begotten Son and Word of God became incarnate of the Ever-Virgin.*

The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ is a mystery, as His coming is at once both hidden and manifest. Being born, not in Rome, in the palace of a king, but in a small cave in Bethlehem of Judea, He is concealed from the unworthy. God the Father has hidden *"these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Mat 11:25)*. These things are hidden from the chosen and elite of Jerusalem, and yet revealed to foreigners, wise men from the east, veiled from scholars who scourer the Sacred and prophetic writ in learned institutions, but divulged to humble shepherds by direct angelic revelation in the dark of night. The Creator of the world suffers obscurity, bearing deprivations from His very first day on earth. He being perfect, submits to the Law, enduring circumcision and pouring His blood on the eighth day. He undergoes Baptism needing no washing of sins, but washes away yours sins and mine. Paradise, having been closed by the first man, Adam, has now been opened by the New Man, Christ. God became man so that man may become God. And so He adopts human nature in its entirety, for what has been assumed by God has been redeemed by Him as well.

If by Christ's first Coming – becoming incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and dwelling among men – as a precondition man must cleanse his heart or he shall not fathom this great mystery, then so in opposition to this, in His Second Coming – for He shall come again to judge both the living and the dead, Whose Kingdom shall have no end – there shall be no obscurity for we shall see Him as He is, whether we are prepared or not.

As concerns the Second Coming of Christ, the disciples asked their Divine Teacher: *"what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world"* (Matthew

24: 3). And God answered them and all of mankind with His own lips: *"Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Mat. 24-21). "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory (Lk. 21: 25-27). The Holy Apostle Paul continues: "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power" (II Timothy 3:1-5).*

These words remind us of King Herod whose heart became distressed and all of Jerusalem with him by the arrival of the Magi who inquired of the whereabouts of the promised Messiah, King Herod who out of fear and envy destroyed the infants aged two years and under in Bethlehem and throughout its borders in his attempt to destroy the New-born King. Yet, King Herod could not stop God in our Lord Jesus Christ's First Coming. Likewise, dear Brothers and Sisters, no one can prevent our Lord's dread Second Coming.

Nonetheless, may our hearts not fail us in the day of tribulation! Let this day help us all. A man's heart will not fail him, if he is circumspect like Holy Righteous Joseph who did not harm the Virgin when he thought she had violated the Law, if he is watching in the field of his life like the shepherds who on that cold night first saw Holy Angels and then God Himself, if he toils in his journey towards God and brings Him offerings as did the Magi who sojourned great distances and brought before the Lord precious gifts.

*"Thou has sweetened me with Thy love, O Christ, and by Thy Divine zeal has Thou changed me. But do Thou consume my sins with immaterial fire, and vouchsafe me to be filled with delight in Thee; that leaping for joy, O Good One, I may magnify Thy two comings" (from the preparatory prayers before Holy Communion).*

*Nativity of Christ*  
Archpriest Paul Volmensky, Rector  
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