

# Do not be “little” in effort

Nativity Fast Message of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman

## NATIVITY FAST 2005

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”*

*Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel.*

*And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth.*

*(Micah 5:2-4, Vespers of the Nativity of Christ)*

### To the Reverend Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of New England

Dearly beloved:

The days are growing shorter, the leaves are falling, and temperatures are tumbling. We are moving into the wonderful forty day fast in preparation for the Feast of the Nativity of Christ. These days are especially meaningful for us in America as we begin to be overwhelmed by the commercialism of the days to come.

The Prophet Micah proclaimed to the humble town of Bethlehem that although it was “little,” it would bring forth the One who was to be the Ruler (i.e., the Messiah) in Israel. So also, we are reminded that even though our souls are “little,” the Lord is prepared to come and dwell in us. The fast, self-denial and repentance is our effort at preparing for this wondrous event.

The prophet also speaks of the remnant that will return to the children of Israel. What is the time of the fast if it is not precisely a time of “return”? A return to the path given to us in the Church. A return to the effort at living a life of holiness. The Church is the new Israel – those chosen by God to be His people. So these holy days are given to us to return in repentance to the Church.

Finally, the prophet announces that this Messiah shall “stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord.” Our fast is the movement away from the foods of this world, which feed the appetites which will lead to destruction. The hunger that arises is to be the hunger for the new-born Lord.



Beloved sisters and brothers, I invite you to make use of this time of holiness to be “little” only in relationship to God, not in effort. Fast, pray, confess your sins, and live the life of the Church. Such effort shall be rewarded when we stand in the midst of the feast and sing, “Christ is Born! Glorify Him!”

With love in Christ,

†HERMAN

Archbishop of Washington and New York  
Metropolitan of All America and Canada  
Locum tenens of the Diocese of New England

## Bishop Nikon elected

As this issue of *Orthodox New England* went to press, we received word of the election of

His Grace, Bishop Nikon  
Bishop of Boston, New England  
and the Albanian Archdiocese

More information will be in next month’s issue of *ONE*.

November is “Charity Month” in the OCA. Please be generous.



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**ON THE DOCKET**

A listing of upcoming events in the Diocese.  
Please forward any dates you wish to be included to the Editor.

November 8-9, 2005

*Feastday of St. Nectarios of Aegina*  
*Christ the Savior Church, Southbury, CT*

November 10, 2005

*Connecticut Deanery Meeting, 7:00 P.M.*  
*Ss. Cyril and Methodius Church, Terryville, CT*

November 19, 2005

*Connecticut Deanery Parish Retreat, 9:00 A.M.-3:00 P.M.*  
*"Creating a Mission-Minded Parish"*  
*Fr. Luke Veronis*  
*Holy Transfiguration Church, New Haven, CT*

November 30, 2005

*Diocesan Council Meeting, 6:30 P.M.*  
*Holy Trinity Church, New Britain, CT*

December 2-3, 2005

*Connecticut Bible Lecture Series*  
*St. Paul's Letter to the Romans*  
*Fr. Paul Tarazi*  
*Christ the Savior Church, Southbury, CT*

**O.N.E. Press Fund**

YES, I enjoy the articles, correspondence and editorials of *O.N.E. (Orthodox New England)* and would like to contribute towards the expenses of publishing this periodical. Find enclosed my check made out to "Diocese of New England."

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**FORCC News**

Our September 15 meeting was held at the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, Park Avenue, Bridgeport. Dr. John Zarras, Senior Facilities Project chairman, and his committee are in the process of collecting information on the various types of facilities and services available to seniors.

Sub deacon Wylie Meath from St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church, Silver Lane, Stratford was guest speaker. He spoke on the personal benefits of the ministry along with the need to bring a sense of faith to those who are incarcerated.

You are cordially invited to attend our meetings. They are held on Thursday evening from 7:30 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. Our November 17<sup>th</sup> meeting will be held at Three Saints, Ansonia and will include the election of officers.

- submitted by Barbara Ann Dixon

# Around the Parishes

## Ansonia, Connecticut

The fall saw our Sunday School back in session and children coming weekly. Fr. Nicholas Timpko held a procession after Divine Liturgy on Sunday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, with the Sunday School children and altar servers down to the auditorium to bless the new bookstore. There is much excitement about the store – especially with the children – every week they like to browse and see what is new. We invite all to take a look or call Carol/Steve Zavednak if there is something special you're looking for.

We have been busy having pierogi workshops to prepare for our Annual Food & Craft fair that will be held Friday November 11 and Saturday, November 12. We also have many new ideas in the works as well as some traditional favorites. We hope to see many faces, both new and old for the fair.

– submitted by Julie Craft

## OUR DIOCESE

PEOPLE  
PLACES  
EVENTS

## Claremont, New Hampshire

One of the cultural events of the year in Claremont is scheduled for November 12. This is the Annual Food Sale featuring a large number of both Russian ethnic and American foods prepared by HROC members. It attracts a large number of folk from the city and surrounding suburbs. The 2004 food sale income exceeded \$3000 and provided needed financial support to the parish budget.

According to Margaret Powell, church school coordinator, the parish school started up again after summer vacation with three age-related groups. They include the four 5-6 year old children under Noora Lichter and Matushka Galina Tregubov, the eight 7-13 year olds under Margaret Powell, and the four 14-18 year olds under Father Andrew and Greg Uhrin.

The Lichter/Tregubov preschool group is working with manual arts and crafts projects and enjoying Bible stories using the Antiochian Gospel Program.

Margaret's group centers its lessons on the liturgical calendar, working on play scripts, and occasional board games.

The high school group meets for weekly discussions after Divine Liturgy on a number of topics and participates in charity projects.

For the past year or so there was some feeling in the

parish that the prior website was dated and not adequately communicating to parishioners, the diocese, and the national church all the activities and events that serve to define, explain, and expand the mission of the HROC community in Claremont, surrounding towns and eastern Vermont.

Thus, following the model of the updated and revised website of the OCA, several parishioners, including the Tregubov family, organized and established a new website, entitled [www.hroc.org](http://www.hroc.org), with linkages to OCA and diocesan websites, other Orthodox churches and websites of interest. It has been available for the past several weeks on the internet.

The new website includes a monthly calendar of liturgical divine services, feasts and saints. Other items of interest in parish life include current announcements, birthdays, anniversaries, reports of past events, parish council notes, and church school events/announcements. There, also, is a prayer list, parish history and photos, sermons, articles on Orthodox customs, prayers and icons.

Unique to the new website is "The Forums of HROC", an interactive exchange of thoughts, commentary, and questions on a variety of topics.

Under the heading of Orthodox Customs, for example, is an article by HROC parishioner Oksana Nikolajchuk, formerly from the western Ukraine, who wrote of "krashanky" or the Lenten practice, legends, and customs of "pysanky" in that part of the Ukraine where she was born and grew up before coming to the U.S.

– submitted by Lawrence Johnson

## New Britain, Connecticut

A "delegation" from Holy Trinity parish composed of Lydia Dorsey, Katia Szeshtakow, Dina Karanowytsh, and

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(L-R) Lydia Dorsey, Fr. Antony and Bev Gori, Katia Szeshtakow, Dina Karanowytsh, and Ruth Lucas in Kingston, MA  
(Photo: Lydia Dorsey)

# Making Unity Happen

## The OCA Council and the AOCA Convention

by Fr. Thomas Hopko

In successive weeks in July I attended the 14<sup>th</sup> All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America and the 47<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. I was an observer at the OCA Council in Toronto, whose theme was *Our Church and the Future*, and also served as guardian for two of our grandchildren, who participated in the youth program, *Becoming What You Are*.

At the AOCA Convention in Detroit I gave two talks on the convention theme, "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Romans 12:2). I also delivered the main address at the Grand Banquet. A main point in my presentations was that Orthodox unity in North America will happen when our churches prove that they are "not conformed to this world" by sacrificing their pride, power, prestige, possessions and pleasures for the sake of being united in one church.

As official church assemblies, the two gatherings were the same in substance and spirit. Clergy and lay delegates heard reports, discussed issues and made decisions about their church's life and work. Other participants observed the proceedings. And still others, including many young people, engaged in educational and recreational activities and events.

The AOCA Convention was longer, larger and more multi-faceted than the OCA Council. It also had an ethnic dimension (Arabic, of course) that was wholly absent from the OCA Council (although the Romanian, Albanian and Bulgarian dioceses in the OCA have assemblies dealing with ethnic interests similar to the "ethnic aspect" of the Antiochian Conven-

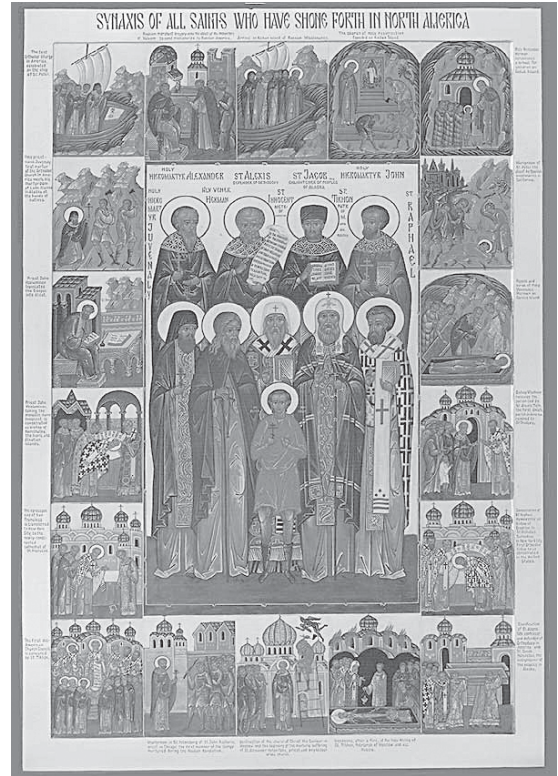
tion). The AOCA Convention also had events with music and dancing, which the OCA Council did not.

Matins and Vespers were served daily at each assembly. The AOCA Convention also had Bible study in the morning and Compline at night. Priests served the Divine Liturgies at the AOCA Convention, except for the final Lord's Day Liturgy served by Metropolitan Philip and his brother bishops.

Metropolitan Herman and his fellow hierarchs celebrated the three Divine Liturgies at the OCA Council. Many participants took advantage of opportunities for sacramental confession at both assemblies. Some Arabic was used at the liturgical services in Detroit, although most of each service and all of the sermons were in English. The preaching and singing at both gatherings were superb.

Both assemblies had programs for young people. The AOCA Convention witnessed the last rounds of a Bible Bowl for young people on St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, and an Oratorical Contest on themes related to Romans 12:2. Metropolitan Philip and the bishops attended these events as an integral part of the convention proceedings. The teenage teams and orators in these two events were the winners of regional competitions in the seven AOCA dioceses.

There were no contests for young people at the OCA Council, but representatives from each age group in the youth program made moving presentations at the assembly's final session. Over eighty volunteers covered their own expenses to come to Toronto to care for the youth.



Many who attended the two assemblies felt that the presence and participation of the young church members were their most inspiring and encouraging feature.

An amazing thing happened at the final Divine Liturgies at both assemblies that was certainly planned by God. It was exactly the same thing, and was completely spontaneous.

During Holy Communion, while the hundreds of priests and people were partaking of Christ's Body and Blood, choirs of young people at both liturgies led the communicants in singing the entire Polyeleon (Psalm 136) in the lively Greek melody (sometimes called "Athonite"). And at both liturgies, immediately after the festive psalm, the same youngsters led the faithful in singing the Carpathian folk hymn consisting of Christ's words, "A new commandment I give to you, that you should

## UNITY FROM 4

love each other even as I have loved you" (John 13:34-35).

This remarkable coincidence was clearly orchestrated by the Lord Himself. It was His message, delivered through His children, that His churches should act at all times and in every way to "become what they are" when they partake of Holy Communion.

A high point of the OCA Council was a taped video message by Bishop Basil of Wichita of the AOCA. The popular hierarch spoke about the common history of the two churches in North America. He emphasized the need for the OCA to continue to serve as a catalyst for the unity of all Orthodox churches in the new world. And he stressed the necessity of strengthening relations between the two churches that would result in their eventual unification, and that of Orthodoxy as a whole in North America. Bishop Basil's message, like the forceful words on Orthodox unity by Metropolitans Herman and Philip, were received with enthusiastic applause.

The two assemblies in July demonstrated beyond any doubt that "the hour has come" for the Orthodox Church in America and the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America to glorify God, and to have God glorified in them, by dying to themselves as distinct ecclesiastical entities in order to be raised into one church body. (See John 13:31-32.) The two churches share a common history in North America from the time of Saint Tikhon and Saint Raphael. Changing the changeable in ethnic traditions and interests, their committed members are exactly the same kind of people.

Both churches have a significant number of converts to Orthodoxy among their clergy and laity. The seven Antiochian bishops include three born in America, one of whom is a convert to Orthodoxy, the only one not of Arabic origin. The Orthodox Church in America

hierarchy includes nine bishops born in the USA, one born in Canada, one in Mexico, one in Bulgaria and one in Romania. Eight of the thirteen OCA bishops are converts to Orthodoxy. Two of the OCA's hierarchs, one being the metropolitan and the other a convert, are of Slav/Russian heritage. Two are of Romanian nationality, one being a convert. And one each are of Bulgarian, Albanian and Serbian blood.

What an impressive synod these bishops could form to govern a unified Orthodox Church in North America! We can imagine a first assembly of this new church body. The primate would be chosen by lot from two candidates, one presented by each of the churches. A suitable person (for example, someone like the elder Archimandrite Roman Braga) would pick his name from a chalice after an All-night Vigil, Divine Liturgy and Service of Prayer.

If deemed necessary and permitted by the Patriarchate of Antioch, an Arabic-speaking archbishop from North America could continue to sit on the Patriarchal Synod in Damascus as long as this was required and desired. The bishops of the church's regional dioceses would have different cities for their titles and cathedrals. They would continue at first to govern their flocks mostly as they now do, especially when ethnic considerations must be honored for pastoral reasons. They would implement plans for working in harmony with each other, and with the Orthodox hierarchs and churches still governed from abroad.

Little by little, with prudence, patience and many sacrifices, the church's various ministries would be unified as conditions demanded and allowed. Funding of church activities and projects would slowly and gradually be combined. Church properties would remain in control of their present owners until common ownership could be achieved. Their use by all Orthodox Christians would be governed by the bishops in the respective dioceses, and by all the governing bishops in

the church's common synod.

The Orthodox Church in North America would, of course, continue to support Orthodox churches, institutions and missions around the world, especially those closest to its members. North American support for Orthodox work abroad would grow greater and more effective as the churches in the new world became more deeply unified and united. All Orthodox churches in the United States, Canada and Mexico would be invited to join in the common work of the new church according to their convictions and circumstances.

No Orthodox would be excluded. All Orthodox would be welcome. In his report to the AOCA Convention, and in his printed message in the convention book, Metropolitan Philip declared that "nothing will happen unless we make it happen."

Thousands of Orthodox believers in North America agree with him. Certainly those who participated in the assemblies in Toronto and Detroit demonstrated that they do. And they also demonstrated in word and deed that the time has finally come for the Orthodox Church in America and the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America to make unity happen between them for God's glory and the good of God's people. May the Lord, with whom all things are possible, grant that this unity be actualized at their next assembly convened in common in 2008.

*(Fr. Thomas Hopko is Dean Emeritus of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, NY. This article is reprinted from the October 2005 issue of The Word, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.)*



**PARISHES FROM 3**

Ruth Lucas journeyed from New Britain to Kingston, Massachusetts on September 11th, to visit former parishioners, Fr. Antony and Bev Gori. They attended liturgy at St. Mark's, enjoyed some fellowship with the parishioners, and then joined the Goris for lunch at a local restaurant. We are so proud of our parish "son" and wife, who are doing good work in God's vineyard.

Our parish joyously celebrated the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Sisterhood of the Protection of the Theotokos. On Saturday evening, October 8<sup>th</sup>, we celebrated a memorial service for all the departed members of the sisterhood. On Sunday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, we celebrated a Moleben at the end of liturgy for all the members of the sisterhood and then enjoyed a wonderful luncheon in the church hall. Thankyou to all the members of the sisterhood, who have spent years of service to the parish.

***New Haven, Connecticut***

On Sunday, September 25, we welcomed His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, His Grace, Bishop Nikon, OCA Chancellor Father Robert Kondratick and Matushka Elizabeth, Secretary to the Metropolitan Father David Brum, Dean of St. Vladimir's Seminary, Professor John Erickson and wife Helen, Dean of the Connecticut Deanery Father John Dresko and Matushka Elizabeth.

We celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Father Michael and Matushka Lydia Westerberg's service to our parish and the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our parish with a Hierarchal Divine Liturgy and the ordination of Deacon Joshua Mosher to the priesthood. Following the coffee hour, we attended a Banquet held at the Country House Restaurant in East Haven. Martha Asarisi was in charge of the banquet reservations.

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, presented Gramotas to the following:

- A Synodal Gramota (signed by all the hierarchs of the Orthodox Church In America) to Holy Transfiguration Church on the occasion of its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

- A Gramota to Archpriest Michael and Matushka Lydia Westerberg on the occasion of their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Holy Transfiguration Church in New Haven.

- A Gramota for many years of long and faithful service to: Sonya Sidoriak Hitt; Patricia and Peter Karlak; Vera and Robert Anthony Muthersbaugh; Barbara and Joseph Pope; Holy Transfiguration Parish Choir; The Altar Guild' the Ladies Auxiliary; The Orthodox Christian Library Outreach and to the New Haven "R" Club.

Congratulations, God's blessings and Many Years to all the recipients.

Once again, the Orthodox Christian Library Outreach (OCLO) group of our parish hosted the SVS lecture series. Thanks to the Orthodox Christian Library Outreach (OCLO) members for coordinating these events and Heidi Crosby for coordinating the great "munchies" on the hospitality table.

Many thanks also to the many guests who attended the lectures for bringing goodies. May God grant all of you Many Years! We hope you will return for our Spring 2006 Lecture Series beginning on Monday May 1 and ending on Monday May 22. Father Paul Nadim Tarazi will be the speaker and the topic will be *An Exposition of the Book of Isaiah*.

Thanks to Anastasia Avgerinos, our ticket coordinator for the annual FORCC benefit dinner held on October 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, Bridgeport. Also to Sonya Hitt for coordinating our Sunday school registration program.

Our new Library, handicap restroom and closets project has been completed. Work on the lift is continuing.

- submitted by Barbara Ann Dixon

***Norwich, Connecticut***

It has been a very busy late summer

for our church. On August 25-28, 2005 we again had a booth at the Brooklyn Fair in Brooklyn, CT. This year instead of being in back of the fair, we had our booth at the entrance. This year it was not as terribly hot and humid as it was last year. We sold both potato and cabbage pierogi and kielbasa sandwiches with George Stoloronek's famous sauerkraut. The cabbage pierogi were all sold out by early Saturday and everything else was gone by early Sunday afternoon.

On September 18, 2005 we celebrated the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Nicholas Orthodox Church. We welcomed His Grace, Bishop Nikon, Bishop of Boston and Administrator of the Diocese of New England and Protodeacon Paul Nimchek to help us celebrate. Emily King presented Bishop Nikon with flowers as he entered the church. The choir was excellent as usual and Father Dennis was presented with a jeweled cross by Bishop Nikon. A dinner/dance was held that afternoon at the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church parish hall in Norwich. We all enjoyed a great meal catered by Olde Tymes Restaurant, wine made by a parishioner, a tasty cake and danced to the music of Jade. The Master of Ceremonies was Church President, Fred Tarasuk and speeches were given by Fr. Michael Westerberg, Fr. Dennis and Bishop Nikon. Father Dennis is in the process of finalizing a Commemorative Book of our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Because of the many activities that have taken place, the parish council decided that we will not hold our traditional Harvest Festival this year. However, we will have a Christmas bake sale in December.

In June, the Ford family moved to Slidell, LA. Eric Ford is in the U. S. Coast Guard and had been teaching at the U. S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, CT. Slidell was directly in the path of hurricane Katrina. They evacuated to Eric's family home in Texas and are all safe. Their house in Slidell was one of two in their neighborhood still standing, with only minimal damage.

This past April, Alice Jarrow

celebrated her 101th birthday. Many, Many Years.

Church school classes began on September 25th and we wish all our students a great year.

Two of our young adults graduated from high school in June and started college this fall. Alexander Melesko is attending the University of Connecticut and Danielle Fratoni is attending Central Connecticut State University.

– submitted by *Vincent Melesko*

### ***Southbury, Connecticut***

As the leaves begin to change and the air takes on a new crispness, we at Christ The Savior begin to feel an excitement as the feast of St. Nectarios draws near. This year, we will celebrate the Eve of the Feast on Tuesday, November 8 with Great Vespers and a procession with the holy relics.

On the Feast of the Holy Cross,

we received an extremely special and precious gift. A stoll which belonged to St. Nectarios, and had been kept safe in Greece since his passing was brought to us. The awesome knowledge that such a man as St. Nectarios used this stoll when hearing confessions and during services is overwhelming. We feel truly blessed to have such a powerful presence and tangible part of our patron saint's life in our midst.

In addition to the stoll, we were also brought a relic from St. Nectarios' body. The relic is housed in a handmade silver box, which a group of women in Greece, who were protecting the stoll and relics after St. Nectarios' death had especially made there for our community. Please plan to join us on the evening of November 8<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 P.M. for our festal celebration.

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, the ladies of the community joined together for a wonderful surprise shower in honor of Manna Whitfield. Manna, her

husband Lee, daughters Ayame and Mia look forward to the birth of their baby girl. We all look forward to the new life too!

Our feet were pounding the streets of Southbury and Woodbury during the weekend of September 24-25 in an effort to raise money for hurricane Katrina victims as well as the Southbury Fuel Bank and the Woodbury Food Bank. We participated in the Tour de Tribury Bike and Walk event and also the Woodbury Crop Walk. Monies raised were donated to those in need in our local community and also in the Gulf states.

Our community hosted a caregiver seminar on September 20<sup>th</sup> given in conjunction with the Western Connecticut Center for the Aging. Resources and consultation were shared with people of different backgrounds and needs in the area.

– submitted by *Sarah Cole*

### **The Nativity of Christ**

†Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

**T**here is anguish when a woman is in labour, but all this is forgotten when the child is born, because a man has come into the world. Someone has come into the world to live, someone has entered into the realm of transitory life in order to grow into life eternal, and the birth of a child is always perceived as the beginning of life and as the beginning of eternity, once more incarnate, once more made real, visible, tangible, become part of human joy and human simplicity.

And yet, when we think of the nativity of Christ, the birth on earth of the Son of God, we see it in a quite different way. One of the ancient miniatures representing the birth of the Lord, shows us, apart from the habitual features of a cave, of the Mother Virgin, of Joseph, of the familiar animals, the manger standing by, deposited on an altar of sacrifice. And the child is lying on it

as probably Isaac laid on the altar which Abraham had built in order to bring him as a blood offering to the Lord. Every one of us is born through temporary life into eternal life; the Eternal One, He who is life itself, is born into the world in order to enter into the realm of death. Eternal, Immortal God enters into the realm of man, not only the created world, but to enter the fallen world where death is the end of our earthly pilgrimage.

**W**hen we look at this image of the new-born child, lying on an altar of stones, ready for a sacrifice, brought as an offering, we can well ask ourselves, "Who is he who sacrifices this child?", and we have an answer: it is the Father who gives us His Son that through His death we may live. We see here incarnate, clearly expressed, divine Love, and the measure of this love divine. The Only-Begotten Son is given unto death, delivered unto death for our sakes. Saint Paul ponders on the event, and he exclaims, "Hardly would anyone die

for a friend, and Christ died for us while we still were enemies of God."

God called us into existence, it was a one-sided act, not of His own powerful will, but of His immeasurable love. He called us into existence, that we may share with Him not only existence, but life, become partakers of all that He is; we are called, in the words of Saint Peter, to become partakers of divine nature; we are called to be brethren and sisters of Christ, sons and daughters of the Living God.

He created us in an act of love and in this act of love, from the first, He gave Himself as an offering to us. And this offering is always a sacrifice. In order to make this offering meaningful, He gave us freedom, the freedom to accept love and to reject love, to love Him in response to His love, or discard His love and, through our deeds, through all our attitude to Him and to life, to proclaim to Him that His love is of no avail to us, that we do not want it, that it is in vain that he has loved us first, it is in vain that He had loved us so much as to give

**NATIVITY TO 8**

## NATIVITY FROM 7

His Only Begotten Son for us.

**G**od gives us the freedom, and we ask very often, "Why?!" – why have we not been made in such a way that, compelled by a blessed necessity, we would be unable to go wrong, that we should be made in such a way that we always and in all things would respond to the best. But is it not simply because where there is no freedom of love and rejection of love, there is no love? If we gravitated towards one another without any choice, it would be a law of nature, it would not be an act of free gift of oneself and of acceptance of the other. This freedom means love, at least the possibility of love, as it means also the possibility for us to reject God. But God in His freedom does not reject us. He remains faithful to the last, perfectly generous, heroically faithful.

And when the freedom of man is misused, He uses His freedom to come, and to reach out towards us at the very depth of ourselves, at the extreme distance which we reach when we die to love. He enters this very realm which is the realm where there is no love, where there is only dividedness, brokenness and separation, both from God and from one another and within ourselves, the inner brokenness and conflict between mind and heart, between

conscience and action: Christ is born into the realm of death we have made through the misuse of freedom, because we have forgotten that freedom culminates, is fulfilled in that love which gives itself perfectly, which is forgetfulness of self, which is the laying down of one's life for the other.

**L**et us then look at this crib not as we do when we are small children, seeing only an image of a child's birth, miraculous, wonderful; let us look at it with an earnest and adult gaze, and see that this crib is an altar of sacrifice, that this cave where He was born is an image of that cave in which He will be deposited, a young man, killed for God's sake after the agony of the Garden and the agony of the Cross, and let us ask ourselves, 'Are we, each of us, a response to love revealed in such a way, revealed to such degree? "Will we find in ourselves a response, or shall we only say, "It was His choice, I have chosen against Him. He has chosen life for me, I have chosen death for Him".'

Is that the answer which we will give? Oh, not in words, but in deeds, through our life, through our attitude to our own self, in which our own dividedness is not overcome, through our attitude to one another in which those people for whom Christ lived and died remain to us strangers, irrelevant and can be brushed out of our way, or through

our attitude to Him Whom we do not treat as our everpresent invisible neighbour, for Whom we have no thought, no compassion, no charity, no love.

Or are we going to respond to this revelation of love in which the frailty of love is made visible, perceptible to us in the frailty of this little human body deposited on the straw of a crib, respond to the frailty of God by a mature love?

This is the question which now the day of Christmas sets before us, and we have days and months of liturgical unfolding of the year, to grow through it towards a definitive and final answer when we will see love sacrificed on Calvary. We have got this liturgical year to follow step by step, in this year we will discover how the saints of God have responded, and at every step the question will stand before us: "And what about you, what about thee personally, what about us in our togetherness, what is our answer to love?" Amen. (*Copyright: Estate of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh.*)

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