



The Nativity Message of Archbishop Mark to the pious flock of the Diocese of Great Britain and Ireland

The Word was made flesh (Jn. 1, 14)

The mystery of the incarnation of the Word of God cannot be understood by our feeble human reason. Even the angels, archangels and other bodiless heavenly hosts do not know precisely **how** this was accomplished. The Holy Fathers affirm that for man, who has not yet been fully healed of the sin of pride, it is not without danger to explore the Divine depths, in which this mystery of the Council of the Threefold Sun of the Godhead is concealed. But at the same time the Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition clearly reveal to all of us **why** the Son of God was born in Bethlehem from the Most Pure Virgin Mary. The Word of God, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the Divine Logos, became incarnate uniquely for our sakes and for our salvation.

The Almighty Lord, *upholding all things by the word of his power* (Heb. 1, 3), the all-creating Word, by Whom *the heavens were made* (Ps. 32, 6), by Whom *all things were made* and the whole *world was made* (Jn. 1, 3 and 10), chose us – fallen, feeble, unwise, poor, to give us His riches. He, on Whom the many-eyed cherubim and the fiery seraphim dare not gaze, came down to our extreme weakness, in order to become the father, brother and friend of us who had been cast out. He became the Son of Man, He took on human flesh in order to make us partakers and heirs of ineffable glory and His Kingdom. The Son of God entered into our nature, infected by the sin in which it was perishing, in order to heal us from inside. He who possesses the greatest riches became a beggar in order to give His riches to us who are beggars.

From all creation man is closer and more akin than any other creature to the All-Merciful Saviour. The Lord does not feed any other creature with His most pure Body and His life-giving Blood. No other creature was made in the image and likeness of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us reflect on why of all names in human language the Son of God chose for Himself the name ‘the Word’. Is it not so that we, his disciples and followers, should cherish the gift of the word which distinguishes us from all other earthly creatures?

Inasmuch as we are made in the image and the likeness of God, the image of the Word of God and its power should also be reflected in our human word. If used in accordance with its Divine intent, it makes everything good, as does the Word of God. The word of those who are pleasing to God heals and teaches, tames wild animals and consoles the grieving, lifts up the fallen and raises the dead. The word of man, given wings by the aspiration of prayer, passes without hindrance through the heavens and reaches up to the throne of God. As it was in ancient and not so ancient times, so, by the grace of Him Who gives grace, it can be in our times too.

However, nowadays many no longer believe in the creating power of the word and carelessly neglect this gift of God, using it for base and fleshly aims. The filth of sin has made the word of man powerless. The world, as never before, is suffocating and perishing from idle, empty and untruthful words, the very ones for which we will most certainly have to answer at the Last and Dread Judgement. If the word is not sanctified by prayer, if that which is bestowed on us in order to commune with God becomes a means to attain purely earthly aims, it is transformed from a creative power into a destructive power, pernicious for the human soul. There are more than enough examples of this in the contemporary world.

But we, the children of the Church of Christ, even now do not belong to this world which, to its loss, has rejected the Word of God. The Lord Himself *chose us out of the world* (Jn. 15, 19), as before He chose His first disciples. We, *the chosen people*, Orthodox Christians, know that the Word of God not only once became flesh for us, but also forever remains with us in the Church, in His Body. It remains with us, sanctifying our human word, and guarding its power which is in the image of God, when we use it for prayer in accordance with our ministry. Pastors use it in the word that edifies and exposes; teachers in the word of wisdom and discernment; disciples and the flock in the word of humility, meekness and obedience in the image of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is *meek and lowly in heart* (Matt. 11, 29).

Today the world needs the word of truth no less than when *the light of knowledge* first shone forth to it from the cave in Bethlehem. In the Church of Christ this light shines forth eternally from the Heavenly Bethlehem, the Word of God sounds forth in the Church, enlightening and sanctifying the flock of Christ the Word. The Lord did not come to earth to destroy fallen humanity, but to save it. If our word abides in conformity with the Word of God, our hearts and minds will be filled with His Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, and we will become true children of God in the Highest and beacons of light to the world, which even though *it lieth in wickedness* (Jn. 5, 19), still awaits its salvation. Amen.

+ Archbishop Mark.

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