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Date: Jan 12, 2015 (6th day of Nativity)

Main subject: Liturgy this Wed, Jan 14 8am at the .... unit.

### ***Christ is born!***

Christ is born! This is the traditional Nativity greeting. The answer is usually "Glorify him!"

### ***Twelve Days of Christmas***

I am sending this via jpay on Monday morning. I hope you will have it by Tuesday morning. It has been a long time, and prison and church schedules have conspired against us. I am finally coming to see you again, this Wednesday, Jan 14, 8am. I plan to celebrate liturgy. If I get permission, I will bring coffee and "baklava", which is certainly the Greek pastry that is in heaven. I will ask permission today. In any case, prepare for liturgy this Wednesday.

We Orthodox really feast when we feast. For us, this feasting certainly involves food, but mostly, it involves talking about the feast many times in our services. You have heard of the Twelve days of Christmas? There are that many days, before the next great feast, "Theophany" (Baptism of the lord). During this entire time, for 11 straight days, we do not fast from anything, and we have lots of hymnology about the Nativity in our services.

In the world, people prepare for a holiday by parties, and after holiday, it is forgotten the next day. We prepare by fasting, and then linger over the feast for many days. This is a startling lesson in the difference between the world, which is shallow and often without meaning or purpose, and true Christianity, for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

The Nativity feast is an example. We fast for 40 days, have tons of services which talk about Nativity leading up to the actual day, then the feast day itself, then we talk about the feast in our services for 11 days, before we get ready for the next feast, Theophany. We do not fast for 11 days, and then the day before Theophany (the 12th day of Christmas), we fast, to get ourselves spiritually ready for the feast.

The same principle applies to the feast of feasts, Pascha, known in the West by the completely non-descriptive name "Easter". Pascha means "Passover", and Christ IS our Passover, so the name makes sense; "Easter" is the name of some Babylonian god, I think. We do not do bunnies in Orthodoxy. We fast for about 50 days, have the feast of Pascha, and then spend 39 days talking about it, until the next feast, Ascension, which is always 40 days after Pascha (counting Pascha itself as day 1).

Enjoy this fast free period, and God and the warden willing, the bakalava. I am running of time today, so I will need to cut this letter short. No rest for the wicked! I wish I could write more, but the day is going to be a full one. I will try to fill up the space with a few Nativity related quotes. God bless you!

### ***Gleanings for the Holy Fathers – Nativity***

... He comes not as a fierce man of war, threatening all things living with death, but as a newly born babe, bringing the hope of rebirth and life into the entire realm of death; He comes--but the land of destruction does not meet, does not embrace, does not praise, does not even see its Saviour, and does not hear the Word of God keeping silence in a manger. Virtually in vain does the glory which Jesus Christ had with God the Father before the world was (John 17:5) on the lips of the angels, follow Him descending into the world and pursuing Him, attain even unto the earth. - Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow

... The incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us. - St. Athanasius the Great

... Today the Lord is born, the life and salvation of mankind; today a reconciliation is made of Divinity to humanity, and of humanity to Divinity; today all creation has leapt for joy; those above sent toward those below; and those below towards those above; today occurred the death of darkness and the life of humanity; today a way was made toward God for man and a way for God into the soul. - St. Macarius the Great

He who sits at the right hand of the Father goes without shelter at the inn, that He may for us prepare many mansions in the house of His heavenly Father ... He was born, not in the house of His parents, but at the inn, by the wayside, because through the mystery of the Incarnation He is become the Way, by which He guides us to our home . -Venerable Bede

Jesus Christ, radiant center of glory, image of our God, the invisible Father, revealer of His eternal designs, prince of peace; Father of the world to come. For our sake he took the likeness of a slave, becoming flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, for our sake, wrapped in swaddling bands and laid in a manger adored by the shepherds and hymned by the angelic powers, who sang: Glory to God in the heavens and on earth peace and good to men. Make us worthy, Lord, to celebrate and to conclude in peace the feast which magnifies the rising of Thy light, by avoiding empty words, working with justice, fleeing from the passions, and raising up the spirit above earthly goods. Bless Thy Church, formed long ago to be united with Thou through Thy life-giving blood. Come to the aid of Thy faithful shepherds, of the priests and the teachers of the Gospel. Bless Thy faithful whose only hope is in Thy mercy; Christian souls, the sick, those who are tormented in spirit, and those who have asked us to pray for them. Have pity, in Thy infinite clemency, and preserve us in fitness to receive the future, endless, good things. We celebrate Thy glorious Nativity with the Father who sent thee for our redemption, with the life-giving Spirit, now and for ever and through all ages. Amen  
from an ancient Syriac liturgy

The Firstborn, Who was begotten according to His nature, underwent yet another birth outside His nature, so that we too would understand that after our natural birth, we must undergo another (birth) outside our nature. As a spiritual being, He was unable to become physical until the time of physical birth. And so too physical beings, unless they undergo another birth, cannot become spiritual. The Son, Whose birth is beyond investigation, underwent another birth which can be investigated. So, by the one we learn that His majesty is limitless, and by the other we realize that His goodness is boundless. For His majesty increases without bounds, Whose first birth cannot be imagined by any mind, and His goodness overflows without limit, Whose other birth is proclaimed by every mouth. - St. Ephrem the Syrian, Homily on Our Lord's Nativity

This document is at:

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