

Nativity of the Savior: Dec 25, 2018 / Jan 7, 2019

Things in my heart, that are always true no matter what the date is.

St. Joseph the All Comely Orthodox Texas Prison Ministry

This is the “insert” to a Nativity card I sent to the men I see in prison. They will see it before January 7. If I had my act together they would’ve even seen it before December 25, but they all know that my secretary is not very efficient. The main card was

An “**Explanation of the icon of the Nativity of the Savior**” – a 4 page booklet. They love stuff like this. The insert, also 4 pages, was my personal message.

This “insert” card: http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2018+nativity-2019-card-insert.pdf

or http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2018+nativity-2019-card-insert.doc

The explanation: http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/traditions_2018+nativity-icon-explained.pdf

http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/traditions_2018+nativity-icon-explained.doc

St. Joseph the All Comely Orthodox Texas Prison Ministry:

<http://www.orthodox.net/ministries/orthodox-prison-ministry.html>

I’ve never been much for Christmas cards, because I don’t like things with canned messages. Since I am cantankerous, I am writing my own. Generally, the message on a Christmas card is “Season’s greetings” or “May you have the joy of Christmas” or something like that, and I mean all those things for you. I just don’t want to say something like that, so I will say what is in my heart.

There are two things in my heart during this season of preparing for the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. One happens every Nativity Fast since I became an Orthodox Christian, and the other is because I know you. If you’re receiving this card it means that I pray for you. I don’t believe in hollow or shallow statements; if we don’t back up what we say with prayer it means nothing.

When I was a boy, I told my parents when I was three years old that I do not believe in Santa Claus because it was a nonsensical idea to me that some fat man would go down the chimney. We didn’t even have a chimney. Even though I was not a Christian, I hated the secular season. I hated that people talked about “doing Christmas” and by that they meant that people gave gifts to one another. The popular saying among some today is “put Christ back in Christmas”, but in the secular world there is no Christ in the Christmas season, only commercialism and frivolity and terrible secular music about snowmen and sleighs and parties and life as usual. And of course, there is the ever-present ridiculous Santa Claus fiction, and the association of Christmas day being a day of giving gifts.

I do not need a certain day to give gifts to the people I love. I pray for each one of you every day, and that is my gift to you. I come to see all of you as often as I can, and that is my gift to you. I write letters, during this period of my life poorly, but nonetheless that is a gift to you. By the way, for those of you who complain that I have not returned a letter, **this card counts!** 😊

I expect only one thing in return from you. I want you to find paradise. I want you to find only God in your deep heart¹.

Back to my little story: When I became an Orthodox Christian, I suddenly loved the Nativity season. In the Orthodox world this is a season of careful preparation and expectation and joy. The entire Nativity fast is filled with hymns that talk about the Nativity of our Lord. Our fasting reminds us that we are preparing for something beautiful. It's an exciting time for me, and I feel its rhythm in my bones. I know that you are an environment when there's so much noise that it's hard to discern any rhythm. I hope you feel the expectation of joy that is in the Nativity season. There is a rhythm in this season. It can be hard to discern if you're not going to all of the services which is obviously an impossibility for you, but you can find this joy if you pray.

The other thing that is in my heart during the Nativity season is you. I never expected to get so involved in prison ministry. The only thing I ever expected to do is try to do whatever God told me to do, and He told me to do prison ministry. Because of this, when Paul speaks of his love for those he is writing letters to, I understand what he is talking about².

I want to tell you what the Nativity of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ means to me, and what I want it to mean to you.

Man was created immortal. Since God made man in His image to obtain His likeness, one of man's attributes is that from the time of his creation, he will never die. Of course, Genesis speaks of man dying if he ate of the forbidden fruit, but this dying means that sinful, unregenerate man would eternally be unable to be in the presence of God without pain, confusion and anguish. This is spiritual death. Spiritual death does not mean cessation of existence, like a bug squashed under a boot. It means man being unable to be in the presence of God because of his sins. God wants us to be in His presence and be united with Him, but He respects our free will because He has free will. He gave us free will. Because of sin we have given away our free will, but God did not take it.

God became man so that He could refashion human nature to be able to live completely free. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life as a human being, and is our standard for what a human being is. That is why I have told you many times that we are not really human yet. Jesus Christ is the perfect human being, and we are to strive to attain to the measure in stature of who He is.

Anyone who thinks seriously about themselves realizes that there are things in them that are just not right. We have anger and judgment and uncertainty and sadness and confusion. God has none of those things. We are made to be like God and be united to Him, and these things that are in us that torment us are because of sin. God did not put them there, but because of His great love, He wants to help us to remove them.

This is what the Nativity of the Savior means to me. All of that junk that is in my heart can someday go away! Isn't this exciting news? It is the best news that I know of.

I want to share with you some of the Scriptures that come to my mind when I think of the Nativity of our Savior. I don't necessarily think of the "Christmas story", which is found only in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. I always think in practical ways about spiritual things. What does it mean for my life and your life because God, in His love for mankind, became perfect man?

"And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way." Matthew 2:12

This is from the end of Matthew's recounting of the Nativity story. It is about the wise men, after they saw the Christ child and worshiped Him did not go back to Herod but rather went back to their country *another way*. This has always resonated with me. If we encounter Christ, we must *change* the way we live. We must do things "*another way*". I am encouraged by the Nativity story in that because of God becoming man, I can learn thing to do things in another way.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: (6) Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: (7) But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: (8) And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (9) Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: (10) That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; (11) And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:5-11

This is a long quote, and it tells me not only what Christ did, but also His motivations and therefore it teaches me what my motivation should be. Our entire life should be an effort to have the *mind of Christ*. Certainly, using only our mind does not work. Only the mind of Christ will lead us to the truth.

There is much work more that I could try to say to you, but this is enough for now. Please be assured of my poor prayers for you. Please be assured of my love for you. May God help you in all things, and bring you joy in this world and the next. Since I have a little bit of room left, I will leave you with gratuitous pictures of monster man and axe man, with me, and their fathers. With love in Christ:

Unworthy priest Seraphim, prays his poor prayers for you, PO 37, McKinney Texas, 75070,
seraphim@orthodox.net, 972-658-5433





¹ Psalm 63:6b "A man shall draw nigh, and the heart is deep". – One of my favorite verses of Scripture!

² Here are a few examples: *Ephesians 1:15-16* "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, (16) Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;..."

1 Corinthians 1:4-5 "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; (5) That in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge;..."

Philippians 1:3-6 "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, (4) Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, (5) For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; (6) Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:..."

Colossians 1:3 "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,..."

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; (3) Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;..."