

His Eminence  
The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend  
Bishop ANTHONY



Archbishop of New York and  
Metropolitan of  
All North America

Diocese of Toledo and  
The Midwest

## ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ  
December 25, 2020

To the beloved Clergy and faithful of our Midwest Diocese,

**Christ is Born! *Glorify Him!***  
**المسيحُ وُلِد! فمجدوه!**

In our meditation on the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ this Christmas, we see the new born Babe as the new Adam. St. Irenaeus of Lyon reminds us, “Just as Adam had been created by the Word of God from the untilled and virgin earth, so also the Word of God created flesh for Himself from a virgin womb when the Son of God became the new Adam, so as to correct the fall into sin of the first Adam.”

As we look into the Cave where the Baby is, we see the animals around Him. I am reminded of the love of the animals for Adam in Paradise before sin entered: “The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field ...” (Genesis 2:20). After Adam and Eve left Paradise and their descendants built cities and began to use animals for their pleasure and pride, the world was ruined by wickedness because man’s “heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). Even after the great Flood when Noah had saved the animals and God made another agreement with mankind, these animals and their generations to come would not trust human beings: “The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth” (Genesis 9:2). Men would rule animals by tyranny not tenderness.

Jesus welcomes the animals back by bringing back, first in this Cave in the wilderness, the Paradise lost long ago. When Jesus began to preach and teach and when He went back to the wilderness no longer as a babe but as a young man, St. Mark in his Gospel says, “he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him” (Mark 1:13). The animals knew Jesus since He was a babe, and the Angels have always known Him since He has always been God. We hear the angels singing again, here in the wilderness walk of Christ as in the wilderness rest at His birth: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men ...” (Luke 2:14).

And the Eastern Kings in their adoration of our Lord, in their gifts for Him, knew He was the “King of kings and the Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16). The shepherds came to worship Him who is the anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior, the Son of God and Son of David, whom God “took from the sheepfolds ... to be the shepherd of Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance” (Psalms 78:70-71). Jesus speaking of Himself said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

Jesus was born into a rude, wilderness Cave, a place of contest with harsh weather and simple shelter. It was just the start of constant stress and rugged demands. Like David and fellow shepherds, He would endure the deprivations of comforts to comfort the sheep: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (Isaiah 40:1) “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord” (Isaiah 40:3). “Remember, O Lord, in David’s favor, all the hardships he endured; how he swore to the Lord and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob, ‘I will not enter my house or get into my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob’” (Psalms 132:1-5).

His earthly life was never easy and finally devastating, one stumbling walk up to Golgotha as a last step to glory. As we all face pressure and tension now with the haunting uncertainty of the virus stalking

*“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)*

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us from behind or racing toward us, we can know that the Lord who has “*endured the Cross for us*” (Hebrews 12:2) and rose in glory will help us endure our cross, rise again in this life, and in the life to come.

From the Vespers of the Nativity, we hear,

*What shall we offer Thee, O Christ, Who for our sakes has appeared on earth as a man? Every creature made by Thee offers Thee thanks: the Angels offer a hymn; the heavens, a star; the Wise Men, gifts; the shepherds, their wonder; the earth, its cave; the wilderness, a manger, and we offer Thee a Virgin Mother! O Pre-eternal God, have mercy on us!*

ماذا نُقدِّمُ لك أَيُّها المسيحُ، لأَنَّكَ ظَهَرْتَ على الأَرْضِ كإنسانٍ مِنْ أَجْلِنا؟ فَكُلُّ فَرْدٍ مِنَ المَخْلوقاتِ التي أُنْذَعَتْها يُقدِّمُ لك شُكْرًا. فالَملائِكَةُ التَّسْبِيحِ، والسَّماواتُ الكَوْكَبِ، والمَجوسُ الهَدايا، والرُّعاةُ التَّعجُّبِ، والأَرْضُ المِغارةَ، والقَفْرُ المِذودِ، وأَمَّا نَحْنُ، فأَمَّا بَتولاً. فِيا أَيُّها الإلهُ الذي قَبِلَ الدُّهورَ، ارحمنا.

As we celebrate this most joyous event with our family and friends, remember the God-Man, Jesus Christ, was born for us! Strive to love one another as He has loved us (*see* John 15:12)!

May He who was born in a cave and lay in a manger for our salvation, Christ our true God, bless you always.

+ Bishop Anthony

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**Bishop of Toledo**

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