

The Gift of Christ

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is born!

Brothers and Sisters, today we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord according to the flesh.

And, as is the custom, today many of us will exchange gifts with one another in honor of the Feast. So perhaps it is beneficial to consider for a moment the theological dimension of this practice of gift giving as it pertains to the Nativity of Christ.

First we know that the practice of gift giving is an offshoot of our love for one another. And that any gift, no matter what it is, should be given and received as an expression of this love.

But if we are going to give a gift to someone as an expression of our love, we have to be smart enough to find the right gift, the gift which will make the other person happy, the gift that will fulfill the needs or wants of the person who is to receive the gift.

And in addition to knowing what is the right gift to give, we also have to have the means to acquire it – most often we think here of having enough money to buy the gift, but as we know not all gifts are material.

Now often times, when giving gifts we as human beings run into one of two problems – either we don't know what to give, or we don't have the means or ability to give what we know we should.

However, when we consider gift giving on the divine level, when we consider God as the Giver of gifts, these problems do not exist; He is all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful – and He gives us everything we need to make us happy and to fulfill us on every level.

We know that in the beginning, God created the world as a kingdom for the crown of His creation, the man made in His own image and likeness.

Now the Fathers teach that while the creation of the cosmos was truly a great and marvelous thing – an absolutely superb gift of God – the creation of man after God's own image and likeness was infinitely greater and more marvelous. The creation of man after God's image and likeness was the gift par excellence because it allowed for man's union with God – a communion gifted in Paradise but a communion lost through sin and death.

However, as we know, God's will for man's union with Him could not be denied.

Throughout the entire time of the Old Testament, God prepared man to once again receive this gift of communion with Him. He gave the Law, the Prophets, the Messianic

Promises, and when the fullness of time had come He gave His own Son, who was, as we are about to recite in the Liturgy, “born of a woman, becoming Incarnate of the Holy Virgin Mary, emptying Himself, taking the form a servant, being likened to the body of our lowliness, that He might liken us to the image of His glory.”¹

This Incarnate Son of God is the divine, holy, most perfect gift of God. The Evangelist John in his most famous passage writes, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

And as the gift of God, Christ is the only Gift which can fully and perfectly satisfy the desire of man’s heart – He is the only Gift which can fulfill the contemplation of man’s mind – and He is the only gift whereby man can have life eternal.

To see that only Christ can satisfy us, perhaps there is no better example than that of King Solomon from the Old Testament. King Solomon was a man gifted with unfathomable riches, fame, power, and wisdom, but a man tormented because he could not satisfy the desire of his heart.

He was so rich, that all the furnishings of his palace were covered with gold, so wise, that all the rulers of the earth sought his counsel, so mighty, that all the kings of the world feared him, but so discontent, because he knew that even though he could obtain any earthly thing that he desired, they were all just vain and empty, water-less wells unable to quench his thirst for true fulfillment.

And so King Solomon even though he had everything, he lived a tortured existence because he could not satisfy the one true desire of his heart – he could not restore the lost communion with God. And for this reason, he together with all the righteous of the Old Testament, considered the things of this world as vanity and looked to the coming of the Messiah, the One who would bring the gift of salvation to all.

Now let us look to an example from the New Testament – the Magi. These wise men from the East having learned of the coming of King of the Jews, traveled from afar to come and worship before Him and offer Him gifts.

However, if we stop for a moment to put on our theological glasses we will see that upon closer examination this was not merely an offering of gifts but rather an exchange of gifts.

Why an exchange? And what was exchanged?

Well God offered to man through the Incarnate Son of God the Gift man had rejected in Paradise – communion with the Him, a share in divine life. And man, personified by the wise men, offered to God what he had formerly and unlawfully seized for himself in Paradise.

¹ Eucharistic prayers of St. Basil the Great.

What do we mean here? What did man unlawfully seize for himself in Paradise?

We remember that in disobediendly partaking of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Paradise, man had tried to make himself a king and a god – that is he tried to usurp God's throne. And for this reason, all he succeeded in doing was bringing upon himself death.

And so this is why the wise men, on behalf of the entire human race, brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh: gold because they were returning to the acknowledgment that God is the only true King, frankincense because they were returning to the worship of the Lord as the only true God, and myrrh because Christ, as the bringer of the Resurrection, would abolish death and there would no longer be any more need for myrrh as a burial ointment.

And so, brothers and sisters in Christ, today we glorify the Lord and marvel at His boundless love, wisdom, and power.

For He not only created us after His image and likeness so that we could share in His divine life. But He also, when we had fallen away through sin, sent His only-begotten Son into the world, as the greatest Gift ever given to men – the gift of redemption, salvation, and true fulfillment.

So let us take heed to the wisdom of Solomon and account all earthly things as vanity since they are unable to quench the desires of our hearts. And with the Magi, let us return to the Lord what we had, through our pride, tried to steal from Him in Paradise, that is let us return to the Lord the glory, dominion, and majesty which are due only unto Him as God.

And in doing so we will receive what we had lost – the gift of communion with God, the Gift that is offered once again to us today, the Gift of Christ.

To Him be the glory, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Christ is born!