



AFTERFEAST OF THE NATIVITY

December 28

THE HYMN

Aposticha, Matins December 28

"Never has anyone been so poor as our God, or so rich as Adam, recreated in godliness, the Virgin cried out as she held in her arms Emmanuel, our God and Creator, Who had clothed himself with flesh from her. Let us cry to Him: Blessed are You, our newborn God: glory to You!"

THE SERMON

A Humble God

This hymn proposes a paradoxical but deeply theological way of thinking about God. In a poetic manner, the Virgin Mary is holding the newborn Christ in her arms and wonders: how can we accept that God All-Mighty comes into the world in such a modest and humble manner? How can we fathom that the Creator of the world chooses to lay in a manger intended for animals? How can we imagine that the sinful and disobedient Adam finds a way to bask in divine abundance once more?

With her role in the Incarnation of God, the Virgin Mary becomes the vessel of God's grace to humankind. Adam sinned by disobeying God's command. With Paradise lost, the direct link of communication with the Creator was gone. On his own, Adam, and by extension, the entire human race, could not be saved. Humankind could not on its own regain the divine honor once occupied in Paradise. God Himself, out of love for us, in an act of extreme humility, assumes human nature in order to make Adam whole again. As a result, Adam can once more share in God's Divinity.



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God, the Creator of all, becomes Emmanuel. "Emmanuel" means "God is among us." God took on flesh through the Theotokos to heal us from Adam's sin, allowing us to reclaim our privileged place in His Kingdom. God, who exists eternally, is born into the world. God becomes human! He becomes human but remains God, losing none of His Divinity.

The pre-eternal Son of God – incorruptible, invisible, and incorporeal – comes to dwell within our corruptible and visible bodies. For what reason? Because as Saint John Chrysostom explains, we are more likely to believe what we see than what we hear. So, God accepts to appear before us in the visible form of a human being, dispelling our doubts about His existence. And then, after teaching us with His tangible and irrefutable presence, He leads us to the true faith, to the invisible and supernatural elements of the faith. But His will is clear. God seeks to inject honor upon shame. To clothe immorality with glory. To turn insult into virtue.

Marveling at this miracle of Christmas, we exclaim along with the Virgin Mary and Adam: Emmanuel assumes our body. He offers us His Spirit, the life-giving power of His Divinity. He grants us the treasure of eternal life. Christ receives as well as offers. He takes on our flesh to sanctify us. He offers us His Spirit to save us. Blessed are you, our God, who was born for us. To You alone belong all glory!