



AFTERFEAST OF THE NATIVITY

December 29

THE HYMN

Heirmos, 9th Ode, Matins of December 29

"It is impossible for God to be seen by people; and angelic orders dare not to look at Him. But the Word incarnate has been seen by mankind, through you, O all-pure Virgin. Now magnifying Him, joining the celestial hosts, all generations call you blest."

THE SERMON

A Humble God

It is not possible for us to see God directly with our biological eyes. Today's hymn also mentions that even the angels do not dare look at Him. In fact, no one can see God in a direct and visible manner. Christ's contemporaries only saw the human nature of God in the person of Jesus. The Apostles Peter, James, and John witnessed the glory and radiance of Christ's divine nature during His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. With the Nativity of Jesus through the Most Holy Theotokos, we are able, however, to come into contact with the Messiah, the incarnate Word of God. As Christians, we continue to meet Christ in the Gospel and the sacramental life of the Church. Through the life of prayer, we can actually increasingly connect ourselves to God and His Divine Grace. How is this even possible, one may ask?

God Almighty is inaccessible in His essence, yet we can experience Him in His energies. With our spiritual senses, we can feel His Grace permeating our lives. Every day, we can discern the gifts He bestows on us, the many miraculous interventions He makes on our behalf, and the unfailing protection He grants us. God's omnipresence can be per-



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ceived through His continued and sustained presence in our everyday lives here on earth. In the spiritual life of a Christian, Divine Grace starts being more actively perceived as certain basic conditions are met. The first and most basic requirement is repentance. Repentance can be realized with our determination to cleanse ourselves and move beyond our mistakes, our passions, and sins. Living a life of daily repentance helps us spiritually regenerate ourselves and frees up room within our hearts for Christ to come and dwell in us. Secondly, we need to internalize God's commandments and, above all, the commandment to love. When love genuinely permeates our hearts, we can feel God's Grace and His presence. The evangelist John assures us that: "he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him" (1 John 3:24).

A third aspect of our spiritual life is our active participation in the holy sacraments of our Church. Frequently receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion is especially important. In every Divine Liturgy, we offer bread and wine. Christ comes, sacrifices Himself, offers Himself for the forgiveness of our sins and our salvation. God allows us to receive Him with our human senses in the form of His Body and Blood. He does this out of infinite love for us. God wants all of us to be saved. That is, He wants all of us to be united with Him. God wants our hearts to burn with the desire to be close to Him. When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we surrender ourselves entirely to His mercy, to His love. God is no longer part of a dream or a fantasy. By actively engaging in the practice of our faith, we can actually arrive at a personal and direct encounter with God.

Along with our human eyes, let us open the eyes of our souls so that we can experience God manifesting Himself all around us.