



**AFTERFEAST OF THE NATIVITY +
SYNAXIS OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS**
December 26

THE HYMN

Nativity Vespers

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord, as we tell about this mystery. The middle wall of separation has been broken down; the fiery sword has turned back, the Cherubim permits access to the tree of life; and I partake of the delight of Paradise, from which I was cast out because of disobedience. For the exact Image of the Father, the express Image of his eternity, takes the form of a servant, coming forth from a virgin Mother; and He undergoes no change. He remained what He was, true God; and He took up what he was not, becoming human in His love for humanity. Let us cry out to Him: "You who were born from a Virgin, O God, have mercy on us."

THE SERMON

The Source Of Life

The day after the Nativity Feast, the Church continues to rejoice in the presence of the newborn Christ, but a special place of honor is also reserved for the Most Holy Virgin Mother. The Virgin Mary is the source of Life for having given birth to the Lord. Today's feast is quite fittingly called the "Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos." A synaxis denotes a liturgical assembly. In the Synaxis of the Theotokos, we all come together, each and every one of us, to celebrate and pay tribute to the Mother of Light.



Light radiates over the entire world with the Nativity of the Sun of Righteousness, the Savior Christ. The hymns of the Church are not just poetic verses. They express the most profound theological truth of the Church, a truth grounded in Holy Scripture and the tradition of the Fathers of the Church. Let us consider the hymn set out above. Together with the angels, the shepherds, and the wise men, we are also called to join in the spiritual joy unfolding before us. We are also called to help spread, with jubilation and throughout the world, the good news of our salvation. With the Nativity of Christ, the flaming sword that kept the gate of Paradise closed is cast aside. The angelic orders of the Cherubim, who had been tasked with guarding Paradise, now permit access to the tree of life, which is eternal life.

In the person of Adam, we lost sight of God with our disobedience. We now begin to savor the benefit of our union with God. We are able to experience the energies of God and to mystically unite ourselves to Him; through prayer, with our spiritual struggle, and above all, with our participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

God, who had never stopped loving us, comes to earth today, taking on human flesh and ministers over the mystery of our salvation. By becoming human, God in the person of the newborn Christ loses nothing of His Divinity. He remains a real God, and at the same time, becomes a real human. The God-Man Jesus is sinless because as God, He cannot sin. He is the New Adam who comes to rectify the disobedience of the Old Adam. He takes upon Himself the sin of Adam and confers to the whole of humanity the prospect of reunion with Him.

But why does God do any of this? Because He created us out of love and could not bear for His children to live far from Him. God loves humankind. He loves us in an infinite and absolute manner, and desires for us to be close to Him.

Gathered today at His festive table during Divine Liturgy, full of gratitude for His infinite mercy, we cry out loud to Him: we want to be saved. We long to be united with You. Our God, You who were born from the Holy Virgin, show us Your mercy!