

THE HOLY ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON
His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston



NATIVITY ENCYCLICAL
of
His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

*From Abraham's loins, for our sakes He is come forth,
To raise up as sons all them banefully fallen
Into the darkness of sins that bowed them under;
Though dwelling in light, He is pleased to dwell
in a manger,
Spurning dignity, for the salvation of mortals.*

*Troparion of the 6th Ode
of the Iambic Canon,
Matins of our Saviour's Nativity*

My beloved brethren and sisters in Christ,

I remember reading about a popular American satirist who paid \$50 to discover his family's genealogy. When, finally, he was presented with the list of his ancestors, he decided to pay \$100 to have the family archives destroyed.

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ might have done the same.

Although He had many notable and illustrious ancestors according to the flesh, Christ also had some people in His genealogy who could have raised Jewish eyebrows.

Unlike our American satirist, however, our Saviour did not seek to destroy the embarrassing evidence. To the contrary, His apostles and disciples proclaimed His genealogy to the ends of the world, blazoning it abroad for everyone to see and to hear. Indeed, He not only had such people in His genealogy, but even during His years on earth He drew to Himself people of similar unsavory reputations — thieves, adulterers, harlots, public cheats (the tax-collectors). Even the incurably sick, such as the lepers, were not repugnant to Him. Not even those in the delusion of error — the Samaritans and the pagans — were turned away. All were received and embraced by Him, provided only that they came to Him with a contrite and broken heart, showing Him their wounds, and asking to be healed of their spiritual and physical maladies. Indeed, as the holy Apostle Paul writes of our Saviour, "Both Christ Who sanctifies and they who are sanctified are"

— through our Saviour's incarnation — "all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11).

In his *Second Spiritual Discourse*, Saint Symeon the New Theologian speaks about those whom our Saviour and Liberator gathered to Himself:

Nearly all men reject the weak and the poor as objects of disgust: an earthly king cannot bear the sight of them, rulers turn away from them with loathing, while the rich ignore them and pass them by when they meet them as though they did not exist; nobody thinks it desirable to associate with them. But the supremely good God left the powerful, the wise and the rich of the world, and chose the weak, the ignorant and the poor out of His great and ineffable goodness. Indeed, only for this, who is able to thank Him in a fitting manner? This is the God Who is served by myriads of angelic powers without number, Who "sustains all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3), Whose majesty is beyond anyone's endurance, and He has not disdained to become the father, the friend, the brother of those rejected ones. He willed to become incarnate so that He might become "like unto us in all things except for sin" (Heb. 4:15) and have us share in His glory and His Kingdom. How abundant and great are His riches! How ineffable is our Master and God's condescension!

My beloved, our Saviour has established a hospital here on earth. This hospital treats physical, spiritual, and mental diseases, and even death itself. The name of this hospital is The Church — the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. If you think (or rather, if you are so self-deluded as to think) that you are not physically, and spiritually, and mentally ailing, and that you are not dying, then you don't need this hospital. But if you do understand that you are ailing in soul and body, and in your thoughts, and you suspect that your actions or thoughts could — like the lives of some of Christ's ancestors — raise the eyebrows of your friends and kinsmen, then rejoice and leap for joy, and give glory to God in the highest: for your Physician, your Benefactor, your Father, and Friend and Brother is now born in Bethlehem. In His hospital, you will find what St. Ignatius the Godbearer of Antioch calls "the medicine of immortality and the antidote to death" (*Letter to the Ephesians*). If you tearfully show Him your wounds and ask for His healing, His divine grace will descend upon you and will cleanse and cure the injury. If you were conceived in iniquities, you will be re-born in Holy Baptism and Holy Confession. If you are poor, you will become rich in God. If you are stricken with grief, you will be given hope. If you are defiled, you will be washed and rejuvenated. If you are disgraced, you will rise in honor. If you are old and stricken with years, your youth shall be renewed by His Life-creating Body and Blood.

When our Saviour considered the record of His genealogy according to the flesh, He did not destroy it. Instead, He rent asunder the manuscript of the sins that condemned us.

He was "not ashamed to call us His brethren," nor was He "ashamed to be called our God" (cf. Heb. 11:16).

For this cause, my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, let us rejoice that, as the hymnologist writes, Christ "spurned His dignity for the salvation of mortals."

Christ is born! Glorify Him!



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