



THE MONASTERY OF SAINT TIKHON OF ZADONSK

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November 20, 2017

Beloved of God,

We extend our greetings to all during this Nativity Season as we await the Lord of Glory Who once again comes to us this Nativity.

The Master and Creator of matter clothes Himself in matter so we can experience Him, hold Him, know Him, and come to love Him. The incarnational vision of the Church is expressed in every aspect of the Church's life and worship. It is through the matter of the world that we come to experience and know the incarnate God: the Eucharist, the waters of baptism, the oil of chrismation, the stole of the priest who gives absolution, the icons, the Temple, etc. Through the incarnation, this material world has become a vessel of God's grace that when rightly received transmits to us God's divine life.

Icons remind us that it was through *this* world that God revealed Himself. St. John of Damascus tells us the importance of this incarnational vision of the Church when he says: "I do not worship matter, I worship the Creator of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. I will not cease from honoring that matter which works my salvation" (*Defense Against Those Who Oppose the Holy Images*). Matter really matters! The way in which we treat the world and each other reveals to us the way that we ultimately will be treating God (I John 4:20).

It is through the incarnation that God refashions man, making him able to receive in the innermost depths of his body and soul the Kingdom of God. Our task is to receive this grace and to see the world again as a sign of God's presence, love, and mercy. By offering the matter of this world back to God with thanksgiving, we can make the entire material world a Eucharist. Let us rejoice this Nativity in the beginning of this great mystery of God's redemption of the material world.

With thanksgiving and love for you all who make this Holy Place what it is and what it continues to be by the mercy of God, we wish you all a blessed Nativity Season.

In the newborn Christ,

Archimandrite Sergius
Abbot of St. Tikhon's Monastery