



THE MONASTERY OF SAINT TIKHON OF ZADONSK
175 St Tikhons Rd. Waymart-South Canaan PA 18472

Nativity 2023

Beloved of the Lord,

There is no time or season that does not bring with it diverse difficulties, struggles which challenge our faith in the love and care of God. However, Christ didn't come to take away our struggles. It was precisely *through* His sufferings that he opened a way for us to use our own struggles and tribulations to acquire the likeness of the Son of God in our life. St. Isaac the Syrian tells us that if we flee temptation we actually flee virtue, because where virtue is not tested we can't be certain that it is present. It is essential to change the narrative of our life, reminding ourselves that it is precisely in our daily difficulties that God is with us, transforming us into His likeness. If we recognize the cross in our struggles, this will lead to our personal resurrection and our witness to the power of God.

This coming Nativity, Christ comes to us, bringing us life—His life—that we might have it “more abundantly;” all we have to do is to be open to it. We open ourselves to God's life through a consistent life of prayer, confession, and communion; but everything begins with prayer. Our life of prayer cannot be merely verbal; it must go to and come from the heart. Our return to our heart—our Father's house—is the necessary way to begin each utterance to God. This turning of the heart to the Lord constitutes real prayer and must precede every invocation of His precious and life-giving Name.

As we prepare for His Nativity, we need to begin again the work of consistent prayer. A small beginning could be by using the Jesus prayer for just ten minutes and reading a Gospel passage every day. We can always start again on our spiritual life, which only has a beginning but never has an ending. Let us remember to “cast our care upon the Lord because He cares for us.” Let us remember that the incarnation happens in our lives when we constantly strive to bless, to do good, and to pray for everyone we encounter, friend and seeming enemy. Let us also remember that the cross that God allows into our daily lives can be a resurrection if we constantly return to the Lord at the altar of our heart.

Be assured of our love and prayers as we prepare to meet the Lord once again as He comes to us, the One Who *tabernacled* with us so that we might commune and live with Him forever.

With much love in Christ,
Fr. Archimandrite Sergius