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# THE INCARNATION AND THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

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Fr Andrew Andrews

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# THE INCARNATION BEGINS WITH THE CREATION

- We are made in the image and according to the likeness of God.
- We are more than heredity, environment and biology.
- We are more than our possessions and accomplishments.
- We are human because our fundamental and essential property is to be the most perfect created expressions of God's being and life.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. [Gen 1:26-27]

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# PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

- We are called to be “imitators of God”. We are designed to become partakers of the divine nature.
- We are both spiritual and material beings. We can both know and do what is good, with free will.
- We are able to be by God’s grace and good will absolutely everything that God Himself is by nature:
  - Alive
  - Wise
  - Kind and Compassionate
  - Caretakers of Creation
  - Loving
  - Good
  - Peaceful and Joyful
  - Powerful and Gentle
  - Immortal

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. [Eph 5:1]

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature. [2 Peter 1:3-4]

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# THE CAUSE OF ALL SADNESS AND SORROW

- We have failed to be what God has made us to be.
  - We use our godlike natures and energies for evil instead of good, for lies instead of truth, for destruction instead of creation, for death instead of life.
  - We distort the divine image within us making less visible the likeness to God.
  - We have failed to love as God loves.
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# JESUS, THE SECOND AND FINAL ADAM

- Jesus has come to restore the fullness of God's image and likeness in human beings.
- He enables us to see what we were created to be, for he is the image of the invisible God". Those who see Jesus, see God the Father.
- He restores the image of God in human beings by becoming a real human being. The "final Adam".
- Jesus does everything that the first and original Adam was called to do but failed to do.

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God. [2 Corinthians 4:4]

In his unbounded love, God became what we are that He might make us what He is. [St Irenaeus]

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# WHAT DOES THE WORD INCARNATION MEAN?

- in•car•na•tion \in-kär-`nā-shən\ n (14c) 1 a (1): the embodiment of a deity or spirit in some earthly form (2) cap: the union of the divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ. [Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.
  - Incarnation is the concept of the eternal Word of God (the Logos) “becoming flesh” within history for the salvation of the human race. Incarnation does not simply refer to the act itself (such as the conception of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin, or the event of Christmas); it stands more generally for the whole nexus of events in the life, teachings, sufferings, and glorification of the Lord, considered as the earthly, embodied activity of the Word [Westminster Handbook of Patristic Theology]
  - From the Latin for “in the flesh” (in Greek it's sarkothenta – “made flesh”)
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# BUT WHAT DOES “THE INCARNATION” MEAN?

- The Incarnation of the Word of God is the “enfleshment” of the Word, and here “flesh” means the totality of our human nature.
  - The Word has assumed our human nature and united it to Himself in an indissoluble union that restores the fellowship of God and humankind.
  - The sacramental life of the Church is based on the Incarnation, and the potential for created reality to become a vehicle for spiritual reality.
  - The ultimate manifestation of this is the Eucharist, and the bread and wine “becoming” the Body and Blood of Christ.
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# THE ROAD TO THE INCARNATION

- After the fall, the road to reconciliation and restoration with God continued for centuries with many promises along the way:

God's punishment to the serpent in Eden is prophecy that the seed of woman (Jesus, son of Mary) will ultimately crush the head of Satan.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. [Gen 3:15]

God's favor for Noah and his offering shows the first outward sign of God's desire for reconciliation between Himself and mankind.

I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. [Gen 8:21]

The covenant between God and man becomes more intimate at the time of Abraham and his decedents.

Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed. [Gen 32:28]

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# PROPHECIES OF THE INCARNATION

The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem	But you, O Bethlehem Eph'rathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. [Micah 5:2]
The reign of the Messiah is everlasting	And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. [Daniel 2:45]
The virgin birth	Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Imman'u-el. [Is 7:14-15]
He is the suffering servant who takes upon himself the suffering of the world	As a sheep led to the slaughter, and as a blameless lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation. [Isaiah 53]
The Ever Virgin Mary	Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east; and it was shut. And he said to me, "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut. [Ezekiel 44:1-2]
Prefiguring The Womb of the Theotokos Unburned	But the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire. They walked around in the midst of the flames, singing hymns to God and blessing the Lord. [Daniel 3:23-24]

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# THE INCARNATION IS ALL ABOUT LOVE

- Being the uncreated Son of God, his accomplishments extend to all human beings and are made fully and freely available to all people.
- Jesus, the incarnate Word of God is the new Adam.
- In Him, humankind rediscovers the perfection of our creation in God's image and likeness.
- Through Him we are complete as creatures made by God's grace all that God is by nature.
- He does this all because he loves us.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." [1 Cor 15:22]

... but the free gift of righteousness brings life through the one man Jesus Christ." [Rom 5:15-17]

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# HOW ARE WE TO RESPOND TO GOD'S LOVE?

- The incarnation represents the ultimate expression of God's love.
- The Gospels of Advent Teach Us How To Respond:
  - The Rich Man and His Barns
  - The Rich Young Ruler (What Shall I Do To Inherit Eternal Life)
  - Restoration of the Sight of the Blind Man
  - Healing of the Woman in the Synagogue on the Sabbath
- The Final Weeks:
  - The Great Banquet (Who Is Invited To the Kingdom)
  - The Holy Forefathers followed by the Genealogy of Christ
- Key Saints of December who emphasized charitable works:
  - St Nicholas of Myra (commemoration date)
  - St Herman of Alaska (falling asleep)

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [John 3:16]

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# WHAT WERE THE SHEEP DOING OUT IN WINTER?

- In the earliest days of Christianity, the Feast of the Nativity of Christ was not generally celebrated in the Church. First mention of the Feast is made by Clement of Alexandria, who mentions that certain Egyptians commemorated the birth of Christ on May 20. The Apostolic Constitutions of the first half of the 4th Century set forth that January 6 should be celebrated as both the Feast of the Nativity and Epiphany.
  - St. Gregory of Nyssa in 380 wrote that the faithful of Cappadocia celebrated the Nativity on Dec. 25. The Feast was not celebrated in Jerusalem until the 6th Century, while St. John Chrysostom introduced it at Antioch in 386 and at Constantinople between 398-402. In Rome the Feast of the Nativity of Christ had been celebrated on Dec. 25 since 354.
  - December 25 was ultimately chosen by the Church as the date of the Nativity in order to Christianize the pagan Feast of Natalis Invicti or Invincible Sun, which was celebrated on that day. St. Cyprian of Carthage noted that this anniversary of the invincible sun was made actual only in the birth of Jesus the only invincible One.
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# THE IMAGE OF THE CHURCH AT THE MANGER

- At the meeting of the shepherds and the magi around the cave, the revelation brought by Christ to the entire world is accomplished.
  - The shepherds represent Israel, the heir to the promise.
  - The magi symbolize the call to the Gentiles looking for truth based on their science.
  - Israel and the nations meet at the manger, prefiguring the image of the Church that Christ will found.

Today the Virgin gives birth to the transcendent one, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One! Angels, with shepherds, glorify him! The wise men journey with the star! Since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child! [Kontakion of the Feast]

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# THE NATIVITY

- Thus entered into the world He Whose coming was foretold by the prophets, and Who was born in the same manner in which it had been prophesied:
    - Of a Most-holy Virgin, in the town of Bethlehem
    - Of the lineage of David according to the flesh
    - At the time when there was no king in Jerusalem of the lineage of Judah, but rather when a foreigner named Herod, who sought to kill the infant Messiah, was reigning.
  - After many types and prefigurings, messengers and heralds, prophets and righteous men, wise men and kings, finally He appeared, the Lord of the world and King of kings, to perform the work of the salvation of mankind.
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# THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

- Unlike modern culture, the Orthodox fast during the weeks approaching the Nativity while the world celebrates at holiday parties.
  - The older tradition is to observe a fast in anticipation of and preparation for the Nativity followed by the “Twelve Days of Christmas” which are celebrated with rejoicing.
    - Fasting and kneeling in prayer are not called for during these twelve days.
    - The greeting “Christ is Born! Glorify Him!” is exchanged.
  - Commemorations During the Twelve Days of Christmas:
    - The Synaxis of the Theotokos (combining hymns for the Nativity with those for the Mother of God)
    - St Stephen, the First Martyr
    - David the King and Joseph the Betrothed
    - The 14,000 Holy Innocents
    - The Circumcision and Naming of the Lord
    - The Feast of Theophany
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## QUESTION TO PONDER

- If Adam and Eve had not turned away from God in the Garden of Eden would the Son of God still have become incarnate in the flesh?





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