

September 7, 2018

Greetings to all the Faithful of St. Andrew's,

Christ is among us!

On Sept. 8 The Orthodox tradition celebrates the birth of the Theotokos. The Bible does not contain a narrative of Mary's birth. The earliest writing that we have which tells a story about her birth is a text known as either the "Protoevangelium of James" or "Infancy Gospel of James" and dates from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. In this text we are given the names of Mary's parents: Joachim and Anne.

The main story line is that Joachim and Anne were childless and God blessed them with the birth of Mary, who was raised in holiness and devotion to God. This text, though influential in underscoring the holiness and chosenness of the Virgin Mary, which was first expressed in the Biblical Gospels, is not Sacred Scripture.

Although this "Infancy Gospel" is not canonical, the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos is. This text, as is mentioned above, is also called the "Protoevangelium." The reason for this is that with the birth of Mary the Good News (evangelium) is first (Proto) proclaimed. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is, in seed form so to say, being proclaimed in his mother's birth. Her birth anticipates the birth of Jesus her son. On this Feast day of her birth our tradition celebrates her blessedness, being inspired by the teaching of the Gospel of Luke. In response to God's grace allowing Mary to be the Theotokos (the one who gave birth to God) she, inspired by the Spirit of God, said:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth *all generations will call me blessed*; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever. (Luke 1:46-55)

Following the word of prophecy and commandment presented to us in Mary's prayer, we celebrate the Feast day of her birth, praising her along with all "generations" and calling her "Blessed." As her cousin Elizabeth exclaimed to the Virgin: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:42), so we too in the celebration of this Feast do likewise.

#### APOLYTIKION

Thy nativity, O Theotokos, hath proclaimed joy to the whole universe; for from thee did shine forth the Sun of justice, Christ our God, annulling the curse, and bestowing the blessing, abolishing death and granting us life everlasting.

#### KONTAKION

By thy holy nativity, O pure one, Joachim and Anna were delivered from the reproach of barrenness; and Adam and Eve were delivered from the corruption of death; thy people do celebrate it, having been saved from the stain of iniquity, crying unto thee: The barren doth give birth to the Theotokos, who nourisheth our life.

In Christ,

Fr. Herman