

God gives our lives to us anew at the Nativity
By Bishop Milan Lach, SJ

During the Philip's Fast, we prepare to celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord.

In its liturgical celebration, our Byzantine Catholic Church demonstrates the uniqueness of this event — the coming of the Son of God on earth — for the story of salvation.

We hear just how startling this event is in the hymns of the feast: “I see a strange and marvelous mystery. Heaven is a cave; the cherubic throne a virgin. The manger has become the place where Christ the incomprehensible God lies down. Let us praise and extol him” (Irmos, Ode 9, Canon of the Nativity).

What do we expect from this unique celebration, Christmas 2017?

We are invited to have our hearts filled with gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are used to considering everything that we have and everything that we are as an obvious fact of life. Indeed, the world teaches us we have a right to everything we want. But it is not so.

Our whole life is a gift. All of our relationships — parents, brothers, wives, husbands and children — are gifts.

God desires to give our lives back to us anew, in a life free from the power of death.

This is why Jesus comes into the world. God “so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have everlasting life” (Jn 3:16). God offers his Son, Jesus Christ, as a gift for our redemption.

In these days that make up the Christmas season, we have the space and time to give God our personal response to the gift of his Son. There are many ways to respond.

During Christmastime, we have the example of the world, which attempts to fill itself with material possessions. People buy so many gifts to the point that they put themselves in debt. However, they are sad after this feast, despite their new possessions.

We also have the example of the shepherds of Bethlehem, who, in humility and gratitude, came to bow before the Child Jesus, our most precious gift.

At Vespers we hear how all of creation makes an offering of gratitude to Christ on the Nativity: “O Christ, what shall we offer you for your coming on earth in our humanity for our sake? Every creature that has its being from you gives thanks to you: the angels offer hymns of praise, the heavens give a star; the Magi present their gifts and the shepherds, their wonder; the earth provides a cave and the desert, a manger. As for us, we offer a Virgin Mother. O God who are from all eternity, have mercy on us” (Sticheron at Vespers).

If we offer our hearts to him, he can transfigure us into his image and he can dwell more radiantly in the cave of our hearts. If we allow ourselves to do this, in that moment, the world becomes more beautiful.

Let us seek gratitude so that the beautiful Christ may shine in our hearts for the world this Christmas.

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