

SERMON FOR SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD 2015

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Glory Be To Jesus Christ ! Glory Forever!

My mother is an avid genealogist. She did research on our family that goes back to the 1600's in England. My mom learned a lot about her relatives that she did not know when she found a box with a bunch of old letters from the early 1800's. She learned that her great grandfather, was a pioneer in the settling of the West. He was a map maker who travelled all throughout the west and wrote back some very colorful letters describing his adventures to his sister. Looking at the family tree she made in beautiful calligraphy, I can not help but wonder, in fascination, what was the life story of each. Looking at this family tree, it made me realize, that while my immediate family is small, I am connected to a much larger family, both in the past and I hope and pray in the future, too.

The reason I shared with you my mom's charting of our family tree is because each year on the Sunday before Christmas, the Church traces the family Tree of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Beginning with Abraham and ending with Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Church has done this purposefully to make the important point that Jesus Christ was a historical human being, and God at the same time. The Church wants us to realize the significance of this great feast that we will celebrate on

Wednesday. As St. Athanasius of Alexandria wrote, God became man so that man could become God.

How incredible is this. Jesus took on Human flesh, so that he could raise us up from the darkness of sin, and allow us to shine, with the uncreated light of the God head! Pretty powerful stuff no?

What I find incredible and encouraging about today's Gospel reading is that you and I are a part of the Nativity story. As it is recorded in the Gospel of St. John, Our Lord tells us, I am the vine and you are the branches. By taking on human flesh The Son of God, came to unite himself in a physical way to the human race. Jesus came into the world because after the fall of Adam and Eve, we were scattered, we were wandering in darkness, we were lost and we were wounded. He came to rescue us by grafting us onto his family tree, the tree of everlasting life. The Tree of health and vitality. With Christ's coming into the world we were made as St. Paul describes, members of the Body of a Christ! When we are baptized, we are born again, into the family of Christ. As we will sing on Wednesday in the Liturgy, All who have been Baptized into Christ have put on Christ. This means you and I are in Christ and Christ is in us. This means we are all family, we are connected to one another, in a way that is more powerful than

genetic blood lines. We are joined together, and related because we have the Body and blood of Christ within us. We are a family. Look around you at the people next to you in your pew, behind you and in front of you. These are your family members. While it is true since we are a little church that many of you are genetically related, nonetheless, whether this is true or not we are all blood relatives in the deepest meaning of the world. As members and communicants of this parish, we have the same blood of Christ, coursing through our veins.

I have been your priest for 21 years, I have known no other parish and you are my family. So even if you have very few blood relatives, you are not alone you are a part of the family of this parish. We are family. We are connected to one another, we are a body, we are incomplete without each other. We are here for each other, that is what the Church is all about, bringing wholeness to us, gluing us together when we are falling apart, physical, emotionally and spiritually. Prayer is our life line, it is what strengthens us and lifts us up. Can you imagine what life would be like, if we did not know each other if we never met? I often wonder, what if God sent me to another parish than this one? How different my life would be. I thank God at how rich my life is for having all of you in it. You are my brothers and sisters, my aunts and uncles, my surrogate mom and dads and you younger ones are my children. You are important to me. You are my life. Each of you are

unique, each of you have different gifts, different natures or Natura as Metropolitan Nicholas liked to say. But on the other hand we are the same – we all have the image of God within us. All of us who are members and communicants of this parish, have Christ within us. We are one body, we are family, we are knit together in the bond of love.

The reason we come here to Church each and every week, is so that we find completeness in Christ and in one another. Seeing you in Church makes my heart sing. On Christmas and Easter, you see me, I am on cloud nine having the whole family of the Church together, in body, in spirit as we unite ourself to Christ in Holy Communion.

So today, the Church is reminding us why Jesus Christ came, to join together the family tree of humanity, to unite us, to strengthen us and to heal us. The Christ child came into the world, to heal us and strengthen us and lead us into the kingdom.

My prayer for us this Christmas is that we will be captivated by the Joy of the new borne Babe born in a cavern and laid in a manger, as we ourselves have experienced when our own children and grandchildren were born. I still

remember how happy I was when my boys were born, Ill never forget that as long as I live, when I think about it, I can remember every detail of it. I also have seen your joy when your children were born and when you became grandparents. I love seeing new you new grandparents around your grandchildren. It has made you look and act 10 years younger. You are happier, you smile more. Your life is filled with joy and hope which comes as the result of new life.

This year, my hope and prayer is that we all will experience that same joy, in witnessing the birth of the Savior. As you and I cried when we held our child or grandchild for the first time, I pray that we are all granted the gift of tears, as we pray before the Bethlehem or standing Icon of the Nativity on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, those cleansing joy-filled tears that soften our hardened hearts and weary souls. Come All You Faithful to Bethlehem this week and celebrate this feast, come to all the Services on Christmas Eve. Come with the gift of a pure heart and conscience by having gone to the Holy Mystery of Confession Come prepared to meet the Lord by receiving Holy Communion on Christmas. Come Let us Adore Him, Christ Lord, who is the root and stem of our family tree, the anchor of our life, Our Lord and Saviour!

Christ is in our Midst! He is and ever Shall be!!!!